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Burlesque dancers band together for pit bulls

By **LINDA LOMBARDI**
Associated Press Writer

Deirdre Franklin thinks it's no accident that her fellow burlesque dancers and pinup models feel a kinship with pit bulls.

"They're people who chose to be on the outside and do it their way, who are used to being the underdog," she says. "They identify with the pitbull – they want to change the stereotype."

Changing the stereotype is one thing that Franklin – her stage name is Little Darling – hopes to do with her calendar, "Pinups for Pitbulls." Her other goal is to beat last year's total of more than \$10,000 raised to support pit bull rescue.

Her involvement with bully breed rescue started with one dog that she wasn't able to save, when a woman brought a stray pit bull into an animal shelter where Franklin was a volunteer.

"She thought she was saving its life by bringing it in," recalls Franklin. "I took the dog and put her in the kennel – she was a sweetheart, totally gentle." But the shelter had a policy of euthanizing all pit bulls, and would neither let Franklin adopt the dog nor release it to a pit bull rescue.

Franklin's anger at the death led her to adopt another pit bull from a rescue group. With no experience with the breed, she was fearful. But the dog she adopted, Carla Lou, who'd been left for dead in a Texas basement, "came right out of the cage and was an angel," says Franklin.



The Associated Press
This photo provided by ShannonBrookelmagery.net shows "Little Darling," left, and "Audiogirl" posing with Ciera from the "Pinups for Pitbulls" calendar.



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Now, after years of involvement with rescue, she says this is typical: "Every other pit bull I've met has just wanted to climb in your lap and kiss you and be near you."

Franklin, who works as an auditor by day, decided to start using her dancing and modeling talents to raise money for pit rescue three years ago with the first "Pinups for Pitbulls" calendar. This year the project has gone nationwide with its first models from the West Coast.

Beautiful and quirky in their high heels, red lipstick, and in many cases, elaborate tattoos, these women are more than eye candy.

Models go through an application process to get into the calendar, and the photos feature them with their own dogs and text telling their stories, from heartbreaking rescue tales to one model's description of her dog wagging her tail "so hard that her butt wiggles."

The models must take part in fundraising events, too, but that commitment is no obstacle to attracting participants. There were 50 applicants for this year's calendar.

Franklin says most dancers don't go to school to learn burlesque, so they're accustomed to doing research and creating their own routines to new and old music. "It's their art form," Franklin says. "They work very hard to create something that's only two minutes long and no one might see again."

Some of the women use talents from their day jobs for the cause as well. Carrie Hunter of Los Angeles, the September model, is a graphic designer by day, and did the layout of the calendar and Web site.

Getting e-mails through the Web site about dogs that need homes or need to get out of shelters quickly before they're euthanized, she says, "you get involved on a really personal level."

Hunter, who doesn't own a pit bull (living in a small studio apartment, her own rescue dog is a chihuahua/terrier mix), posed with Baxter, Franklin's second dog, who still has scars from chemical burns that he suffered at the hands of an abuser.

The one dog in the calendar who hasn't yet found a home is the cover model, Ciera. Karen Halker, who took Ciera to the photo shoot for the calendar, says, "She's really an even-tempered dog. She gets along with everybody."

Ciera, who's deaf, is being fostered by Critter Crossings, which has volunteers and foster homes in California and Nevada. Unlike most of the other bully-specific groups that the calendar helps, they're an all-breed rescue. But, says Halker, who volunteers for Critter Crossings, "We're known for taking in underdogs."

On the Net:

<http://www.pinupsforpitbulls.com>

<http://crittercrossingscorp.com/>

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