

Mutilated Dog Getting a Fresh Start

July 2001

VICTORIA – Reno, the boxer whose tongue was removed by unknown captors, was united Saturday with a new family that drove 1,200 miles to adopt him.

"We're going to have a big welcoming party back in Illinois," said Steve Winkler, who with his wife, Becky, and son Matt visited Reno on Saturday at the Southern Animal Rescue Association near Seguin.

"We'll be with him for the rest of his life because we made the decision to help him out," Winkler said of the black-and-tan dog whose plight he learned of on the Internet.

Reno was stolen from his Victoria home on March 24, and when he was returned two weeks later - on the day that reward posters were put up - his tongue was gone.

Dogs use their tongues to pull food and water into their mouths, and they also shed excess body heat through their tongues by panting.

Winkler and Tracy Frank, director of the shelter, speculated that the dognappers thought Reno was a pit bull, a breed known to fight other dogs.

They believe Reno's captors removed his tongue under the mistaken belief he would fight harder without a tongue to get in the way of his teeth.

But Reno is no fighter, and his captors let the maimed boxer go.

Reno was treated by a veterinarian for several weeks before being returned to his family, who later decided they could not keep him because of the extra attention he needed to be fed and watered.

On July 13, he landed at the shelter, where Frank posted an adoption plea on the Internet while sending Reno to a foster family.

"We had people from as far away as Minnesota interested in adopting Reno," Frank said. "We chose the Winklers, and their willingness to come down here is a pretty good testament to their commitment."

The Winklers and Reno were to begin the 19-hour drive back to Galesburg, Ill., today.

Winkler said the family already owns three boxers and a German shepherd/Labrador retriever mix, all adopted from animal shelters.

Frank said Reno's move north will help with the heat.

"He can't be left outside long in this heat; he'll overheat because he can't pant," she said.

Winkler said Reno "will be inside all day in the cool air, then we'll let him out in the yard with the other dogs in the evenings."

At the vet's office and Reno's foster home, syringes of water were squirted into his mouth several times a day, but Saturday he was helping himself, slurping water from a metal stock tank at the shelter.

"It's neat to see that he can get some water on his own," Winkler said.

On Friday, another dog that has lost most of his tongue arrived at the shelter. Almost two weeks ago, his San Antonio owners followed a trail of blood and found the animal with a mangled tongue, possibly from a dog fight, Frank said.

The big, white dog named Dodge has been signed over to the shelter for adoption - one of 424 dogs, 117 cats and three hogs that were available Saturday.

The shelter, supported by donations, can be contacted through its Web site: www.sarasanctuary.org.