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Online adoption applications offer real world results

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Shawn Shames found love on the Internet this summer.

Her perfect match? A 9-month-old Doberman mix from Puerto Rico.

Shames, a Freehold mom who was mourning the loss of another dog she had to put down just a few months ago, found the pup through an application on the social networking site Facebook.

"**Save A Dog**" lets users browse through photos of local rescue dogs and "virtually adopt" them. By spending time on the site and recruiting friends to the cause, users generate points, and all those points add up to real dollars that the site's creators spend on food for shelter dogs around the country.

Shames said she stumbled across the application while browsing Facebook. She couldn't pass up an opportunity to help needy dogs, she said. "I'm a sucker for that."

And there was Marcia. The Monmouth County group Wag On Inn had rescued her from the streets of Puerto Rico and brought her to New Jersey a few months before. Black, with a tan muzzle and eyebrows, she looked just like Shames' beloved Chewy, who died in June.

"I fell in love with her, but I didn't want to say anything," Shames said. "I didn't

know if everybody else was ready for another dog."

So Shames became Marcia's internet foster parent, gradually raising money for dogs like her around the country just by "petting" Marcia with the click of a button and taking her for virtual walks.

When Shames showed her son Eric and husband Barry the photo of the cute Chewy look-alike, "my husband said to me, 'If you're interested, we can look into adopting her,'" Shames said.

Real results

Trevor Wright, founder of **DogTime.com**, the pet-oriented Web site that created **Save A Dog**, said his company created the application with the hope that it would raise awareness of the great animals up for adoption in communities everywhere.

Plus, he said, it would channel some Web advertising funds to the cause in the process.

In just two months, the Facebook application has attracted more than 100,000 users and allowed Wright's company to donate nearly \$7,000 worth of food to shelters, and it's growing bigger by leaps and bounds.

Social networking sites like Facebook and Myspace are packed with games and applications, Wright said, "but this in our minds is really one of the first to have social gaming impact real world events. It's just rewarding to see that happen, and it also makes the whole thing fun."

Wright said he and others at **DogTime** are thrilled with the response they've seen to the **Save A Dog** application. But even better is a trend they've noticed: Some users, like Shawn Shames, aren't satisfied with virtually caring for the dogs they see on the site.

"To actually see them start to foster and adopt them in real life -- well, it was certainly in our wildest dreams," Wright said.

Forever home

Wag On Inn volunteer Jody Davis said she was excited when she got an e-mail from Shames asking about adopting Marcia.

Davis said Marcia had stolen her own heart as soon as she met the puppy, but no one had applied to adopt her yet.

"It was like, 'Well, what's going on here? This is a great dog,' " Davis said.

When Shames' e-mail popped up in her inbox on a Saturday night, Davis said she went right to work checking references. By the end of the weekend, Shames and her family were taking their new dog home.

Shames renamed the puppy Daisy, after her favorite flower.

"It just seemed to suit her," said Shames, who said the lovable dog has made a great adjustment. "She's a big mush. She thinks she's a lap dog."

Davis said the story of pet finding owner was a great one.

"It reminded me of Match.com," she said. And, she pointed out, Daisy's adoption isn't the end of the happy tale. With each dog that goes to a permanent home, Wag On Inn can foster another rescue.

"Another dog got a home and another one took its place," Davis said.

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