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## Couple fighting for lives of dogs they rescued

By Keith Ervin  
*Seattle Times staff reporter*

When Jim and Kim Giuntoli spotted a confused but friendly dog darting through rush-hour traffic on Pacific Highway South in Federal Way, they were determined to save him.

They spent three hours trying to find a shelter or a veterinarian to take



GREG GILBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES  
Jim and Kim Giuntoli visit the Seattle Humane Society in Bellevue to see the two dogs Jim rescued from the southbound lanes of Interstate 5 near Kent. He feared the large dog would be euthanized, so he took both dogs from the King County Animal Shelter in Kent to the Humane Society.



JIM GIUNTOLI

This dog, nicknamed Buddy, was rescued by Jim and Kim Giuntoli and later euthanized at the county shelter in Kent.

**To adopt an animal**

**King County animal shelters:** 21615 64th Ave. S, Kent, 206-296-7387, and 821 164th Ave. N.E., Bellevue, 206-296-3940. <http://kingcounty.gov/pets>

**Seattle Animal Shelter:** 2061 15th Ave. W., Seattle, 206-386-7387, [seattle.gov/animalshelter](http://seattle.gov/animalshelter)

**Seattle Humane Society:** 13212 S.E. Eastgate Way, Bellevue, 425-641-0080, [www.seattlehumane.org](http://www.seattlehumane.org)

the mixed-breed black Labrador retriever. Finally, a veterinary hospital in Issaquah agreed to hold the dog until King County animal control could come get him in the morning.

Last week, 12 days after the playful dog with the floppy ears arrived in a county shelter, he was euthanized. The Giuntolis are keeping close tabs on two other dogs that Jim rescued later.

To the Giuntolis, the death of the dog they called Buddy brought home a controversy over whether King County shelters are killing animals unnecessarily.

The head of the county's shelter program said the dog was put down because he was judged a threat to other animals. County Executive Ron Sims' office has asked a county public-health veterinarian to investigate whether proper procedures were followed.

A citizens oversight committee reported last fall that dogs and cats in county shelters were held in deplorable conditions and workers weren't adequately trained to determine whether animals should be adopted out or euthanized. Two subsequent consultants' reports also blasted care in the crowded, understaffed shelters in Kent and Bellevue.

Veterinary staffing has been increased and the Metropolitan King County Council has appropriated nearly \$1 million to buy more cages, hire more workers and step up pet-adoption efforts.

The council is now mulling whether the county should stay in the shelter business.

The Giuntolis would have taken Buddy to their Auburn home right after finding him June 4, but they have four cats.

He was rambunctious and undisciplined, but not aggressive, said Jim Giuntoli, 44, a restaurant manager for years. "All I got

was big wet kisses on the neck. He was licking my wife's hands."

When the couple stopped at a pet store to buy food, a bowl and a leash, Buddy broke away and ran toward a dachshund. He sniffed the smaller dog and ran off again.

Jim advertised in the newspaper for the owner, and he called the shelter almost daily for updates — and to remind staff that if no one came forward, he'd take Buddy.

But shelter officers wrote that Buddy tried to dominate other dogs, growled at an officer and put his mouth around the arm of an officer who touched his side. "This dog makes me very uncomfortable," one officer wrote. An evaluation by two officers rated the dog's behavior toward cats at less than 1, the lowest score on a scale of 1 to 5.

"The scores do not reflect aggression with people, but they're off the chart — extremely bad aggression — with cats and dogs," said Al Dams, acting manager of animal care and control.

Last week, after Buddy had been in county shelters for 11 days, Jim Giuntoli called the shelter over and over but wasn't able to get through to anyone. The next day, he was told that the dog had been euthanized that morning.

Kim Giuntoli was heartbroken. Jim was sad — and furious.

His thoughts turned immediately to two other dogs he rescued from I-5 a week after he and Kim picked up Buddy. Afraid that mixed-breed terrier and golden retriever would meet the same fate as Buddy, Giuntoli called the shelter and lied: He said he knew the owner and that the owner wanted the dogs back.

"There's no way in hell I'm going to let these two other dogs die," he said later. "I couldn't sleep at night."

Giuntoli admitted to shelter staff the next day he didn't know who the dogs' owner was, but pleaded to be allowed to take them to the Seattle Humane Society in Bellevue, where he thought they would have a better chance of survival.

A behavioral exam at the Kent shelter had cleared the small terrier mix for adoption, but put the golden retriever on track for euthanasia for aggressively defending his food and not liking to be handled.

Dams let the Giuntolis take the dogs to the Humane Society. Like the county shelter, the Humane Society quickly cleared the terrier for adoption.

The retriever will be put up for adoption only if a two-week behavior-modification program breaks him of the habit of growling and stiffening menacingly when food or a toy is taken from him, said shelter manager Katie Olsen.

Dams defends the county shelter record.

"We have several missions," Dams said. "One is saving as many lives of animals as we can. The other is public safety." If an animal is found to be a danger to people or other animals, he said, "then we make the hard decision to euthanize."

Dams said the euthanasia rate has dropped from 34 percent last year to 19 percent through May of this year. County shelters housed 11,801 animals last year.

Jim Giuntoli remains bitter about Buddy's death.

"Here's a dog somebody called about every day and cared about, and here's what happened," he said. "What about the sickly dogs nobody puts an ad in the paper for? Who plays God there?"

*Keith Ervin: 206-464-2105 or [kervin@seattletimes.com](mailto:kervin@seattletimes.com)*