

KELLI MARKO HAD NO IDEA THAT adopting a dog would change her life. She just knew that she wanted to rescue a dog with her husband, who had fond memories of a childhood Golden Retriever. The couple applied to adopt a dog through Denver's Golden Retriever Freedom Rescue, and soon welcomed a 9-week-old Golden mix named Brodie into their home.

"There's something very special about Brodie," Marko says. "He's curious, and so charming and endearing."

Because of his personality, Brodie has cultivated "fence friends"—neighbors who stop by to pet him or toss him a ball. He loves hiking, swimming and car travel, and has been a hit at family reunions, where he's tolerated "endless amounts of poking and prodding" from children. He's even well-behaved with Marko's chickens—despite the fact that baby chicks look quite similar to moving tennis balls, as she quips. Plus, he's always up for a good snuggle.

"Since I'd never had a dog before, I really did not understand the bond that I would have with Brodie—that he would be my best friend, and that life is better when he's with me," Marko says.

Brodie is one of over 3,200 dogs rescued and rehomed by Golden Retriever Freedom Rescue since 2001, when a small group of passionate citizens founded the nonprofit in Denver. Since then, the organization has expanded to hundreds of volunteers with the shared goal of rescuing Golden Retrievers and mixes.

Nicole Incorvaia began volunteering for GRFR in 2005 after adopting a dog from the organization. Since

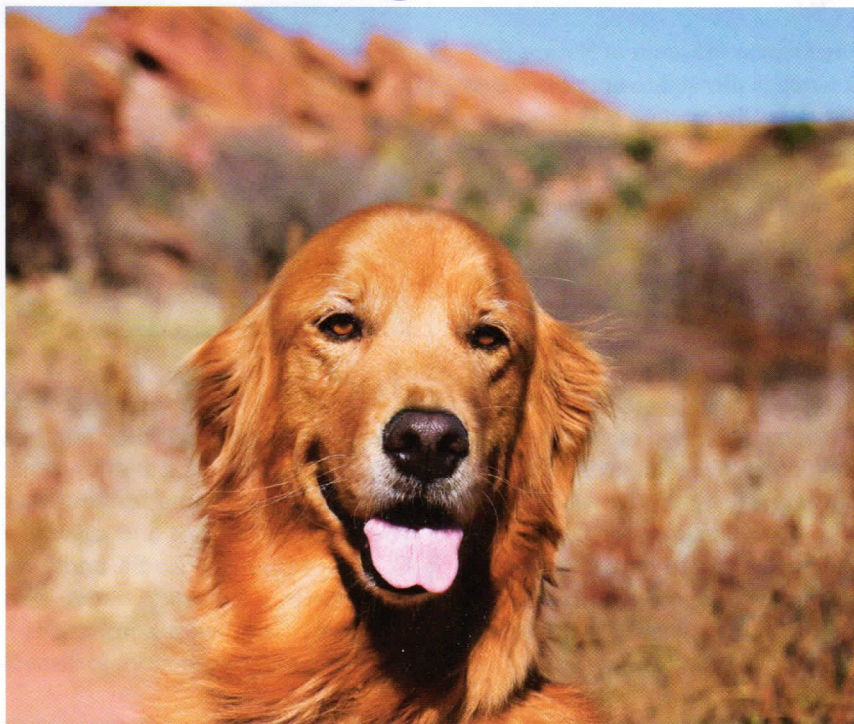
The Details

Golden Retriever Freedom Rescue

P.O. Box 103130, Denver, CO 80250
303-749-8499

goldenretrieverfreedom.com

Golden Age



Over 3,200 dogs have been rescued and rehomed by Golden Retriever Freedom Rescue since 2001

GOLDEN RETRIEVER FREEDOM RESCUE FINDS FOREVER HOMES FOR CANINES IN COLORADO

By Jen Reeder

Photography by Our Family Clicks Photography

then, she's fostered over 500 dogs, served on the board of directors, and currently volunteers as intake coordinator. In this role, she receives requests to help dogs within Colorado as well as such states as Kansas, Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas and Oklahoma. "I've built a network in those areas to be able to help," she says.

For instance, if someone tags her on Facebook about a Golden in need in Kansas City and she approves intake, volunteers with the nonprofit PetEx Rescue 'N Transport will drive the dog—along with other rescued pets—to Hays, Kansas. There, vol-

unteers from the nonprofit Hope for Paws Colorado transport the animals to a meeting place near Denver International Airport. Incorvaia and representatives from other rescue organizations greet the dogs and assign them to foster homes on the Front Range. She notes that GRFR maintains 35-50 active foster homes and is always looking for more.

Meanwhile, GRFR volunteers stay busy screening potential adopters—first with a phone interview, then a home visit and final review by the adoption committee. Some dogs might be ready to go to their forev-

er home within a week of joining GRFR, though others may require additional obedience training or veterinary care.

Though GRFR is completely run by volunteers, fundraising is a must because medical bills can be hefty. The group has obtained prosthetic limbs for dogs with missing paws, and helped senior dogs with special needs. GRFR spends about \$100,000 each year on veterinary treatment.

“Every dog is adopted,” Incorvaia says. “We don’t put them down.”

Fort Collins resident Sandi Good started volunteering with GRFR after adopting a Golden mix named Saydie and being impressed by the organization.

“It takes more than a village. It takes an army of dedicated, selfless volunteers,” she says. “It’s definitely a labor of love, and it’s something we’re very grateful to be able to do.

Good visits homes of potential adopters with her Golden, Sully (also a GRFR alum), and makes follow-up calls with adopters to check on how everything is going



Every dog is adopted

with their new pet. She helps plan fundraising events, such as holiday photos with Santa, dog washes and an annual calendar photo contest featuring dogs adopted from GRFR. A silent auction at the annual picnic for volunteers and adopters raises money as well, though she says the main attraction is seeing GRFR dogs thriving with their new families.

“We’ll have 50 Golden Retrievers all swimming in the lake at the same time,” she says. “It’s a fun way for the volunteers to see the dogs after

they’ve been adopted out and in these loving forever homes.” Good says Golden mixes deserve all the work that goes into saving them.

“They just have the sweetest dispositions and they’re wonderful companions. They love meeting people and being close to their people—they have a real Golden personality,” she says. “They wag their tails with their hearts, you know.”

Many of the dogs are rescued from terrible conditions, but they learn to love and trust again. Good says their resilience is inspiring and urges readers to adopt dogs.

“Whatever the breed, there is a rescue for it,” she says. “Please consider rescue because you can find beautiful dogs. We get them in Golden Retriever Freedom Rescue every day.”

Jen Reeder is an award-winning freelance journalist and president of the Dog Writers Association of America. Her work has appeared in Family Circle, The Daily Beast, AKC Family Dog, Today.com, The Christian Science Monitor, PBS’s Next Avenue and many other publications.



Sonny, Daisy, Freddy and Riley all live in loving homes in the Governor’s Ranch neighborhood