

# Rollin' Along



While working in New Orleans, veteran long-haul trucker Mike Hankins recently met “Sisco,” above, an 11-year-old female Golden Retriever who was owner-surrendered following Hurricane Katrina. Adoption information can be found on page 3 (see On Our Cover). At right, Hankins poses with “Merry,” a Rhodesian Ridgeback- Rottweiler mix whom he is fostering. Fearful of people, Merry was found Christmas morning 2004 tied to the flagpole of a local animal shelter.

It’s 2 a.m. at a truck stop in Little Rock, Ark. This should be like any other night at the stop: engines humming, truckers sleeping, phone calls to home before the rigs roll out in the morning. Instead, the clerk at the fuel desk calls one of the rigs and says, “Are you the trucker having puppies? There’s a woman here to see you.”

Mike Hankins is a veteran long-haul trucker and a volunteer for Rolling Rescue, one of many organizations in the United States dedicated to transporting rescued animals to foster or adoptive homes. These grass-roots networks are comprised of volunteers who drive cars, RVs, SUVs and 18-wheelers. Offering their own gas and hours of time, these transporters meet at rest stops and mall parking lots to personally hand off animals and help ensure that each one makes it safely to its new home.

Hankins hears a knock on the door of his truck cab. A woman from a local

Italian Greyhound rescue holds bags filled with clean bedding. Hankins’ cell phone rings. A man from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, is calling with advice on whelping puppies.

Several hours earlier, Hankins had returned from laundering his sheets and made up his bed. Settling in to watch television, Hankins checked on his dog, “Beethoven,” and the two Chow Chows that he was transporting from Medford, Ore., to Ontario, Canada. “Tess,” the female was pregnant, but a veterinarian had assured Hankins that she was several weeks from delivering.



Trucker Larry Holleran transports “Jimmy,” a rescue Papillon, from Orlando, Fla., to his foster parent Diane Fuchs in Quincy, Fla. Jimmy is a drop-ear variety of Papillon called Phalene. For adoption information, send an e-mail to Fuchs at [www.papillonclub.org/rescue](mailto:www.papillonclub.org/rescue).



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— Laurel Barrick,  
Director, RollingRescue

“Tess let out a yelp and jumped up on the bed. ‘China,’ who is Tess’ adult daughter, jumped down to look on the floor. I suddenly felt something wet underneath my foot. It was a puppy. I put it on the bed with Tess. That night she had seven more pups and ruined my bedding completely,” Hankins says. Hankins was thankful for the clean bedding that had arrived just in time. Exhausted, he cleaned up Tess and the pups, and tried to get some rest. But the calls continued for another two hours.

“I got the last call about 4 a.m.,” he says “That was several hours after she was done whelping. I called Laurel in Michigan and said, ‘It’s over. Please tell everyone to stop calling. We’re going to bed.’”

### Dog Lovers First

Laurel Barrick is Hankins’ significant other and the director of RollingRescue. When Hankins alerted Barrick that night, she sprung into action. Contacting people via phone and instant messages on the Internet, she was able to find local volunteers to provide supplies to Hankins over 800 miles from home.

“This was a situation that you try to avoid,” says Barrick of Grand Rapids, Mich. “You would not normally put a close-term dog on a transport. You would deal with the delivery wherever the animal happened to start or end the trip. If it had been according to plan, Tess would have been whelping at the shelter.”

Barrick and Hankins got involved with transporting when they owned a one-truck company of their own. Hankins found



Brandy Holleran, founder of the rescue transport organization On the Road Again (OTRA), works from her home office coordinating cross-country transports. Sitting on her lap is 8-year-old “JayJay,” also known as Jasmine’s Southern Gentleman. A Papillon lover, Holleran has three Papillons and fosters two.

several abandoned dogs during his years on the road. Their introduction to rescue came when a local rescue agreed to take in one of Hankins' "road rescues." Later, Barrick saw a post on L.O.A.D.S., an e-mail support list for truckers and their families, from a woman who had just formed an e-mail rescue transport called RollingRescue. She was looking for long-haul truckers who could transport animals.

"I knew that Mike would go for that," says Barrick. "We have always been dog lovers. It wasn't all that long afterward that I ended up inheriting the list. It just grew from there. I started out primarily working between truckers. Now we have over 500 members. Most of our volunteers are just average people. They start out as dog lovers, and they hear about this interesting transport group."

Regardless of how the transporters found their way to the job, each needs direction and a constant point of contact throughout the trip. This is where the transport coordinators come into play. The process begins when a coordinator pulls a plea for help off of the Internet message board.

"We require all posters to post basic information about the dog: breed, size, age, immunization record, temperament, behavior, name," Barrick says. "A week ago, I coordinated a traditional relay transport for a 6-year-old German Shepherd Dog named 'Ranger' from a pound in Muskegon, Mich. Ranger, who was blind in one eye and believed to have testicular cancer, was accepted by a rescue in Baltimore.

"A total of eight drivers in four states made it possible to move Ranger. A rescue volunteer in Washington, Pa., overnights Ranger, and he finished his journey on Sunday. We just received the good news that Ranger does not have testicular cancer. He's seeing an eye specialist this week to find out the extent of his eye problems."

To make Ranger's trip possible, Barrick mapped the route from Muskegon to Baltimore. She divided that trip into 50-to-90 mile legs and posted a run sheet on the message board detailing each leg's approximate date and time. RollingRescue's screened volunteers receive e-mail notification of a new transport. To become a member of the Internet list, individuals must complete an application and provide personal and/or veterinary references. Once accepted to the list, volunteers sign up for a leg and coordinate exact meeting details with one another.

"If you push a wheelbarrow, steer a wheelchair or drive an 18-wheeler, you can help in some way with an animal rescue," says Barrick. "Whether you're commuting 50 miles to work every day or vacationing to another state, we can find an animal on your route that needs a lift."

## Perfect Transporters

Truckers are the perfect candidates for transport given their long cross-country hauls. The majority of trucker volunteers are owner/operators. They may be leased to a company, but they own the truck, so they decide who and what can accompany them on a route. Company drivers need approval from their employers to transport animals. There are many companies that allow their drivers to have animals as pets or companions.



## Practicing Safety on the Road

Transporting rescued animals to new homes requires practicing safety at all times. Seasoned drivers offer these tips to help ensure that animals will have the safest possible journey.

- Animals, especially cats, should be crated whenever possible. This helps them feel more secure during transport and reduces the risk of interference with shifting gears, mirrors or driving in general.
- Dogs should be secured and leashed before opening car or truck doors, as dogs are the most likely to bolt at a stop.
- Try to feed and water dogs before starting the transport. A little bit of food can calm the animal's stomach. Too much food can result in carsickness.
- Special medical or behavioral problems should be fully disclosed and understood to protect both the dog and the transporter. Fear biting, deafness, dog aggression, strong prey drive, and a tendency to bolt are examples of things drivers should be aware of before they commit to transporting an animal.
- Transporters and coordinators should know where a dog is going. Checking references and ensuring that a rescue group is a responsible and legitimate organization is of utmost importance.
- Check identification of the person whom you meet for the handoff. Maintain regular contact throughout the trip to ensure that meeting dates and times are accurate.

"Trucking can be dangerous," Barrick says. "Truckers do get robbed and hurt. Dogs are a form of protection and can help prevent some of these things."

Stuart Wallace, a relatively new driver for RollingRescue, agrees. "Transporting animals has been a wonderful experience to fill a void for me. A trucker's life is lonely. Having dogs to keep me company has kept me going. In fact, I'm hoping to adopt a black Scottish Terrier puppy that I just delivered to a rescue shelter. She was adorable and would make a great road dog."

On The Road Again (OTRA) is another transport organization that works with carefully screened rescue groups to find temporary

shelter or permanent homes for animals. OTRA founder Brandy Holleran of Dixie, Ga., started out driving her personal truck for transports.

“Rescue groups started joining the list and asking for help,” Holleran says. “We now have over 600 members and 3,500 contacts across the country.” Retired from trucking, Holleran now spends her days sifting through e-mails and making phone calls to coordinate OTRA transports. “We have some hectic moments trying to pull together a route, but it all seems to work out most of the time,” she says.

Every seasoned coordinator seems to agree. Barrick sums it up best: “We’ve had animals up against some incredible odds. We almost always find a way to get them to a safe home.”



Mimi Farah, right, and daughters Reema, foreground, and Elizabeth snuggle with their dog “Nuruda,” from whom they were separated for several months after Hurricane Katrina. Six rescue transporters for OTRA helped to reunite the family with Nuruda. “I am thankful every day for each person who helped bring our dog back to us,” says Mimi Farah.

## A Long Road Home

“Jazz,” OTRA’s latest success, was up against just such odds. A mixed-breed yellow Labrador, her real name is “Nuruda,” which means “light and sunshine” in Arabic. Her family, Mimi and Omar Farah and their two daughters, was forced to leave her behind when the waters started rising in their New Orleans home after Hurricane Katrina.

“Omar left her on the top of the girls’ bunk beds,” says Mimi Farah. “There wasn’t enough room for all of us when we left. It was heartbreaking. But he had to make a choice to leave her behind.”

Two weeks later a volunteer from PAWS of Austin heard the dog barking in the abandoned house. After breaking down the door, he found her hiding in a closet at the back of the house. She traveled with the rescue group to Austin, Texas, where Chris Chandler and her husband, Chuck, agreed to foster her until the family could be located.

“We named her Jazz because of the New Orleans connection and because she’s kind of a jazzy dog,” says Chris Chandler. “The idea was that we would keep her for a short time thinking that we would be able to find her owners.” However, the information detailing the exact location where Jazz was found was misplaced in the chaos of the Katrina rescues.

“After four months we were concerned that perhaps her owners had passed away. But something kept telling me that she would find her way home,” recalls Chris Chandler.

Piecing together information from detailed satellite photos and memories of the PAWS volunteer, Chris Chandler was able to narrow her search to a four-to-five block area in New Orleans. She obtained contact information and mailed fliers with Jazz’s photo to each of the abandoned residences. By sheer luck, the Farahs’ mail was forwarded to Mimi Farah’s mother.

“She called and said, ‘I think they’ve found your dog.’ I started crying. I couldn’t believe it,” says Mimi Farah. The Farahs were now living in Bluffton, S.C. Although Jazz had been found, there was still the problem of getting her across several states.

OTRA was contacted and five private vehicles and one 18-wheeler later, Jazz was reunited with her family. Woody Wingo, a long-haul trucker from Alabama, picked up Jazz in San Antonio.

Lori Leonhardt drove the third leg of the journey. Leonhardt, a social worker from Columbus, Ga., volunteers for a Catahoula rescue group and transports animals for OTRA almost every weekend. Leonhardt was transporting a Catahoula puppy from Birmingham when Jazz joined the trip.

“We try to combine as much as possible,” Leonhardt says. “There is no telling what you might have in the car. I’ve had five dogs and three cats at one time.”

Jim Davis, the last driver, met the Farah family in Macon, Ga. “I was somewhat surprised that the whole family came,” Davis says. “They were truly excited. As soon as I opened the back of my car, they engulfed her. She had a distinctive dark patch on her left flank. That’s how they were sure it was her.”

For OTRA and all the volunteers who transport animals, Jazz was one of hundreds of successful transports that they make happen each year. For the families who are reuniting with a lost pet or meeting a newly adopted pet for the first time, it is one of the most important days of their lives. ♦