

## Meet Your Neighbor: Wanda Givens Williams - devoted dog rescuer

Wanda Givens Williams was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She worked for Citgo Petroleum Company until she was transferred to Dallas, Texas. She fell in love with a man from Sulphur, Louisiana. She married Mike Jessup, and the two lived in Phoenix, Arizona until Sulphur attracted them both as the perfect place to retire. Williams retired from the human resource field near 2000.

“I’ve always been a pet lover,” she said.

“So in retirement, I was attracted to do volunteer work with the Lake Area Partnerships for Animal Welfare. LAPAW lists all animals that are in rescue on its website with pictures and a biography of each dog. Volunteers keep up the website, [www.lapaw.org](http://www.lapaw.org). I began volunteer work in 2003. LAPAW has around forty volunteers with a dozen who are very active. Anyone who loves dogs can be a helpful volunteer,” Williams said.

“I met Mr. Hardy, who owned the land at the end of Hardy Road in Carlyss. He used the pond to train retrievers in field trial training for area hunters. He wanted to sell, and I wanted to buy, so the deal was made in April 2005.”

“We now have forty rescue dogs and about the same number of customer dogs. Dog owners can reserve a space in the ‘hotel’ to house their pet while they are out of town,” Williams said.

The kennels are large with beds and toys for each dog, and they are air conditioned and heated. Each dog is allowed to have playtime outside three times a day. They are well fed and bathed and groomed when needed. Local veterinarians who support the project make sure all medical needs are met. The organization pays the doctors for their services.

“Some dogs have had operations for cancer. Some have had extensive dental work. We now have a young golden retriever that had a broken pelvis being treated. Many need heartworm treatment. No dog that we know could make a good pet is abandoned. Some are pure bred and some are just good mixes. Our reward is that our project continues, and dogs continue to be adopted,” Williams said.

All the dogs became excited when they detected Williams was walking through the kennel. She petted each dog through the gate as she walked by. Tails were wagging. She greeted each one by name. She names all the rescued dogs and keeps a history on them for future owners.

“We work with a group in the northeast, the American Lab Rescue. In that part of the United States, there is a shortage of labs, whereas here in Louisiana, we have an overabundance. Every so often we take a group of labs or other specially requested dogs in our kennel on wheels transport van up to Little Rock, Arkansas. A van from Connecticut picks up the dogs and brings them up there for families to drive in from others states in the northeast and pick up the adopted dogs.

We also work with Louisiana and Texas rescue groups, Calcasieu Parish Animal Services and Sulphur Animal Control, as well as area vets. Our rescue dogs are usually from these sources. Last year we placed 500 animals between LAPAW and American Lab Rescue. The number goes up every year because of the networking of different groups all over the south. Communication is mostly by email,” Williams said.

Williams admitted to spending sixty to seventy hours weekly on her project. She receives seven to eight hundred emails daily that she reads and responds to until midnight most evenings. Every Saturday, Pet Smart holds adoption from noon to 4 p.m. Four paws on the Bayou, Williams' facility at the end of Hardy Road is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. and on Saturday from 8 a.m. until noon. Adoption costs from \$90 to \$150 for the majority of dogs. A few dogs can cost up to \$200 if their treatments were expensive.

“We keep going from donations. It's the little donations that keep us working. Volunteer workers keep us alive as well. We received a large \$5,000 grant from the Doris Day Foundation in conjunction with the Humane Society of the United States for spaying and neutering dogs for owners who couldn't afford the cost. We were able to operate on 37 animals, but much of the money had to be returned because we couldn't find more animals. Hopefully next February we will receive another grant and be better prepared so all the grant can be spent.”

“We need families to adopt these wonderful pets. Adoption families fill out applications and decide which dog they want. We encourage visits by the entire family including the children and the other pets in the household or friends and relatives that will also interact with the dog. Then we do a veterinarian check to see how previous or present pets are cared for. Once a decision is made, a volunteer goes to the home and makes absolutely sure the animal and the family are a good match. The family can foster the dog for a period of no more than two weeks. If there is any problem, we always take the dog back ourselves.”

“Some people have special requested breeds, and we keep a log of people that want any certain type of dog. The Yorkie is the most requested, but there aren't many. The small breeds go faster than the larger breeds,” Williams said.

Williams has four children. One daughter and one stepson live in Phoenix, Arizona. She has one son in Dallas, Texas and a stepdaughter in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Most of the time, the children come to Sulphur to visit their parents. Williams devotion to Four Paws on the Bayou may have something to do with that.

“I would love for people who have a heart for dogs to consider adoption of one of our well cared for pets,” Williams said.

Many families think of new pets around Easter time and in the spring season. A glance at the pictures on the website [www.lapaw.org](http://www.lapaw.org) may lead them to come to the special spring adoption day which is on Saturday, March 29th at Four Paws. The facility is two blocks north of Highway 108 to the left of South Boudoin Street at the dead end of Hardy Road.”

“We will be serving free hotdogs and cokes, and the lake site is beautiful. This special day will

begin at 10 a.m. and last until 4 p.m. We are hoping for a large group of people to come visit us and learn where we are and what we do. We have wonderful pets that deserve good homes,” Williams concluded.