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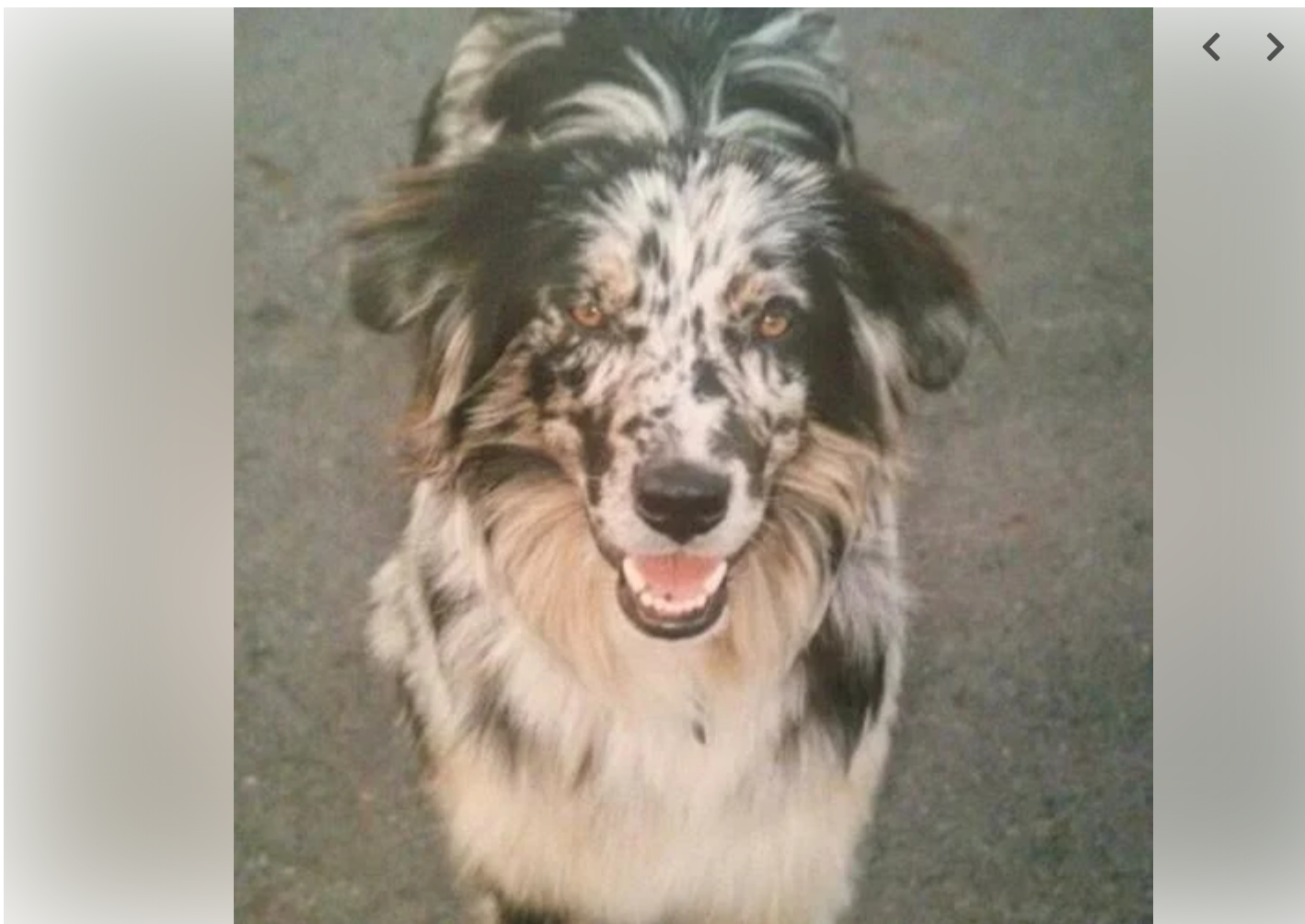
Raise your paws for Hobo's Healing Heart

Local non-profit seeks volunteers

By Sierra Ferguson Black Hills Pioneer

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Kelly Harnett's dog Hobo helped guide rescued pets through trauma to find forever homes. When he passed away at age 12 Harnett founded a non-profit in his honor. A non-profit, that is still helping pets get home. Courtesy photo

SPEARFISH — Kelly Harnett's dog Hobo was a healer and a guide, and the inspiration behind a Black Hills non-profit that supports pet owners and animals in some of their darkest hours.

In 1999, Harnett was working for the Athens County Humane Society, in Ohio, taking in high need rescue animals. Animals who had faced abuse and trauma.

That's how she met Hobo. He was 8 months old when he came into her life, and he'd already taken some hard knocks. Hobo was slow to trust humans, and quick to scamper to safety at the slightest noise or sound of a voice.

It took Harnett about four years to help the pup through his trauma. In that time, she discovered his unique inner light.

As Harnett took in other rescues like Hobo, dogs with high needs and challenging pasts, she discovered her merle friend had a knack for helping others.

Hobo would play a key role in each subsequent pup's recovery, helping them to unlearn bad or fearful habits, and demonstrating good behaviors. One by one, Hobo helped rescues from Athens County Humane Society on their journey to adoptability, with an "if I can do it, so can you" kind of compassion.

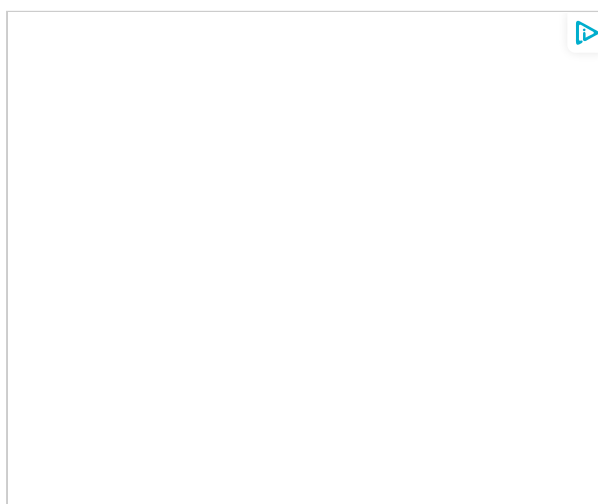
He was Harnett's "once in a lifetime" dog. She can't describe him without batting back tears. Hobo passed away more than 10 years ago, but his legacy lives on.

Since he's been gone, his memory is the driving beat behind Hobo's Healing Heart, a 501c3 non-profit that assists with emergency medical costs for pets in need, and issues grants to cover cremation expenses for animals that have passed on.

Veterinary care is expensive. In 2022, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) estimated the average dog owner spent about \$410 annually for routine medical care and parasite prevention. The average cat owner spent about \$300.

Add in the potential price of an emergency, and its not uncommon for families to find their budget burst wide open.

Harnett said there are myriad reasons why paying for an unexpected surgery, diagnostic test or procedure might be out of the question for owners who are devoted to their pets. Outside expenses can pile up, and family emergencies can be compounded. It's not irresponsible, Harnett said, to need support in getting a four-legged loved one through an emergency.



She learned how a one-time infusion of cash might help save the life of a treasured friend during Hobo's life. At age 6, a vet discovered Hobo had an enlarged heart. Harnett's vet sent dog and owner to a specialist for further testing. Testing that would total up to a whopping \$3,000.

Harnett was able to pay that \$3,000. She learned more about Hobo's heart condition, and he was prescribed an affordable medication that prolonged his life for another six and a half years.

The notion that something like \$3,000 could support a pet and their human through hardship stuck with Harnett. She realized a small financial boost might be the key to helping pets return home after an emergency, in one way or another.

In cases where an animal is likely to survive and maintain a good quality of life, Hobo's Healing Heart is able to step in and help cover the costs of life-saving measures.

Sometimes, circumstances are more dire. In those situations, the non-profit offers assistance with cremation services.

Harnett knows all too well, losing a pet can be just as hard as losing a family member. It can be a harrowing experience. Many pet owners in the Black Hills don't own their own homes or have access to a public pet cemetery, which can sometimes mean leaving their four-legged loved one behind at the vet. That's why Harnett is passionate about making cremation services accessible, so that even at the worst of times, people can bring their best friends home.

In that way, Hobo is still doing the work — helping animals get home. But memory alone is not enough to keep the fund full.

Hobo's Healing Heart needs volunteer support, Harnett said. Volunteers run the core fundraising events that ultimately fund emergency medical procedures and cremation services.

Every year, Hobo's Healing Heart hosts three related 0.5K events, jubilant bar crawls that double as a spoof of more traditional 5K running events.

Event goers wear shirts proclaiming they "survived" the beer and wine "run." Volunteers cheer on "runners" as they make their leisurely way through tastings provided by Crow Peak Brewing Company, Lost Cabin Beer Company, and Prairie Berry Winery.

It's joyful and silly, offering a bright contrast to the heavy heart work of helping animals and their owners through the trauma of injury, shock of illness, or grief of loss. That's on purpose, Harnett said. Balance is a vital ingredient that keeps non-profits operating. That's one of the reasons why the organization is recruiting board members as well.

Board members review applications from pet owners. Harnett said the non-profit wants to be a good steward of donor dollars, so they work hard to make sure every applicant qualified for financial support. Recently the non-profit had to reject an application for a euthanasia that was not medically required. The organization also does not cover pay for treatments for chronic ailments.

By and large, applicants reach out for genuine purposes Harnett said, but she needs support processing the paperwork just the same.

Many hands, she said, make light work. To learn more about volunteering or joining the board at Hobo's Healing Heart visit hoboshealingheart.org/volunteer.

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