



Third grader Avery Lynch with Connie Eastburn.



Volunteer driver Robin Chambless of New Orleans.

# From Mississippi to Maine

*Aided by Bucks volunteers, Katrina dogs get a second chance at life*

*Regina Young*

The dog was underweight. He had open wounds from fleas. His fur – not in the best condition – evidence of life as a stray.

For Kiely Flynn, it was love at first sight. And vice versa, for the yellow Labrador retriever who followed the high schooler wherever she went.

Kiely was helping rebuild a home in the Hurricane Katrina-ravaged region of Bay St. Louis, Miss., when the homeless dog stumbled on to the job site and quickly attached himself to the teen. By the second day of the Habitat for Humanity service project, which took place in January, the Falmouth High School student was in talks with her father to bring the dog back with her to Maine.

Within surrounding communities, Bear, as he is now affectionately called, and Kiely's story touched off a firestorm of interest in adopting homeless dogs from the Gulf Coast.

"Bear put a face on it," said Holly Eastburn MacEwan, a Falmouth service learning coordinator who led the service project. "He made it really real, that these people – humans and dogs – are still struggling down there."

Aided by Bucks volunteers who helped arrange and assist the 1,700-mile transport, 31 former homeless dogs now share the same happy ending as Bear.

Nearly three weeks ago on May 23, a van carrying the canines – 22 of them puppies – made an overnight stop at Connie Eastburn's farm in Doylestown. The dogs, from the Waveland Animal Shelter in Hancock County Miss., were en route to the Animal Welfare Society in Kennebunk, Maine. There, and at the Animal Refuge League in Westbrook and the Coastal Humane Society in Brunswick, they were put up for adoption.

Now enjoying new digs and loving families, had the dogs remained in Mississippi, their lives would already have come to an end.

"These dogs would have been euthanized if this transport did not take place," said Lydia Sattler, director of the Waveland shelter. "They are good, healthy and well-socialized adoptable pets."

It's been nearly four years since the Gulf Coast was

devastated by Hurricane Katrina, but the storm's impact is still palpable. As the area continues rebuilding and repairing efforts, one of the additional factors it is contending with is a surge in displaced pets.

In addition to family pets that were stranded by the storm or had to be left behind during evacuation, puppies born long after the storm made landfall in 2005 are the latest Katrina victims.

"Since Katrina, there has been such a population explosion," said William Eastburn



## Photographs by William Eastburn IV

IV. Eastburn is MacEwan's brother; their parents are Connie and the late William Eastburn III, who co-founded the Bucks Mont Katrina Relief Project.

"We saw quite a few strays," said MacEwan. "When you are down there, you are very aware of the issue."

Waveland's shelter is inundated with homeless pets, some turned in by owners forced to give up their pets because of financial and housing issues.

"We took over 200 animals in the month of May," said Sattler, "and of those we adopted 60. And that was really, really high. Normally our adoption rates are not that high."

The Bucks Mont Katrina Relief Project is presently raising funds to build the Hancock County Animal Center, that will provide a haven for dogs and cats and other small household pets to receive medical care and, for those without homes, to await adoption.

Meanwhile, programs like the adoption-transport can alleviate some of the burden shelters are facing.

"While the economy may lengthen the time it takes to raise the remaining funds for the new animal center, this adoption-supply transport program allows us the opportunity to offer some help now," said Eastburn.

The transport was the result of cooperative efforts by volunteers from Mississippi, Maine and Bucks.

The Warrington-based Animal Lifeline, helped facilitate the transfer. As it happened, a group of students in Delaware Valley College's Animal Lifeline Club, led by



Sean Mullen of Warminster gets a kiss from one of the dogs.

*Delaware Valley College students in West Virginia who helped feed, water and walk the Mississippi dogs during a stop on their way to Maine.*

professor Bryn Donnelly, were on another outreach trip in West Virginia and extended their trip a day to be able to assist the transport.

Around 3 a.m., the students got up and walked, watered and fed the dogs for volunteer drivers Robin Chambless and Prima Luke, who pulled into the Braxton County Animal Center in Sutton, West Virginia, after being on the road for 17 hours.

When the van arrived in Doylestown, countless Bucks volunteers, including area veterinarian Dale Mantell, Bucks County school students and members of Animal Lifeline and the Bucks Mont Katrina Project, were on hand to offer more of the same support.

When it came time for the drivers to return to Mississippi, Falmouth students made sure the van returned home full of pet food and supplies. During the Stock the Puppy Truck drive, students even made homemade dog biscuits and chew toys.

"With this transport program, we are looking to move more than dogs, we are hoping to move some hearts and minds as well," Eastburn said.

For staff who feed, bathe, play and care for the dogs at the shelter, only to see them euthanized in the end because of lack of space, transports are one of the few sources of hope they have.

"That encourages us – that we're not doing it all for nothing, that there is a chance that they're going to get out," said Sattler.

"Their only chance is that they get to go on a transport to a place that's a no kill facility or to people who are already waiting to adopt them. For us, that's the only thing that really keeps our hearts going."



Helping take care of puppies at Connie Eastburn's farm is Denise Bash, right, of Animal Lifeline in Warrington; Nate and Ella Bash and Avery Lynch of Buckingham.