

Street People and Homeless Dogs Form Unique Bonds as Part of Innovative 'Downtown Dog Rescue' Program



By Jennifer Wolfe Photos by Douglas Hill

Drive around any major city, and sooner or later you will find yourself downtown, often a deserted-looking area filled with manufacturing plants and factories punctuated by empty lots and the people who gather in them. And then there are the dogs: everywhere you look you can see dogs, some in packs, some wandering alone, and some with guardians who have no homes.

Most of us avoid spending too much time in these seemingly-deserted areas – drab and neglected, they give rise to concerns about personal safety – and most of us feel only pity for the people, and animals, who spend their lives there.

Los Angeles is no exception. The downtown area is famous for its seeming inhospitableness, and for its burgeoning homeless population. But to many people, downtown is where they call home, and, despite the bleak circumstances, where they intend to stay.

That's where Downtown Dog Rescue steps in.

Downtown Dog Rescue is a unique program that is

making a difference for the many sick, neglected and abandoned dogs who have ended up living on the streets of Los Angeles. The five-year-old volunteer program finds homes for strays roaming the streets and alleys, supplies veterinary services to pets kept by the city's two-legged homeless population, and provides space and facilities for a monthly mobile spay and neuter unit sponsored by the City of Los Angeles. The aim is to make downtown a better place, and its impact is heartwarming.

When Lori Weise and Richard Tuttelmondo – both dog lovers – began managing the Modernica Furniture factory in downtown Los Angeles five years ago, they were overwhelmed and depressed by the mushrooming population of neglected dogs. They wanted to do something about the sad problems; and without any prior experience or training in animal rescue, or in dealing with L.A.'s homeless population, the two began approaching homeless dog guardians to try to make a difference. They soon made an amazing discovery, which has benefited and enhanced many lives.