

Jacksonville couple using movie to save dogs' lives

- By [Charlie Patton](#)
- Story updated at 9:14 AM on Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2009
- Photo by Bob Mack

Scott J. Smith and his wife, Layla, are dog lovers whose pets include a pit bull-basset hound mix named Domino.

So when the Jacksonville couple learned about Mike's Dog House, a nonprofit pit bull rescue shelter in Palatka, they wanted to help.

They started in the spring by volunteering Saturdays at the shelter, helping walk the dogs.

Soon they wanted to do more.

"We saw the struggles they were experiencing," said Layla Smith.

Scott Smith is a professional actor whose credits include HBO's "Recount," "America's Most Wanted," many commercials, and industrial and training films. So the Smiths decided to make a movie about the plight of the dogs who come to Mike's Dog House and the needs of the people who run it.

The result, about 12 minutes long, has been a labor of love for everyone involved, Layla Smith said.

At first it was going to be an amateur effort - just Scott Smith and his camcorder. But as they put out the word, professional colleagues kept volunteering.

"We ran out of jobs for people to do," Layla Smith said.

Champ Kaufmann of Atlantic Video Productions, a former pit bull owner, volunteered the services of his studio.

About eight hours of filming and another 65 to 70 hours of post-production went into "Save 2 Lives," which will get its first public screening at The Jacksonville Landing on Sunday. It will be shown during Yappy Hour, an event for dog lovers and their pets held at the Landing on the third Sunday of each month. This month's Yappy Hour is from 4 to 7 p.m.; "Save 2 Lives" will be shown at 5 p.m.

The Smiths hope the movie, which they would like to show at other public events, will generate help for Mike's Dog House.

Last year, Mike Vermette and his wife, Goldie Barrett, who can accommodate about 20 dogs at a time, placed 101 animals.

Finding them homes can be a challenge, because the much-maligned breed is blamed for sins that are actually the fault of irresponsible or unscrupulous humans, Vermette said. If they are properly trained and cared for, pit bulls make wonderful pets, Vermette said.

After almost six months without an adoption, the shelter placed eight dogs in the last month. Layla Smith said that may be the result of their efforts to spread the word about the shelter and their movie project through Facebook and Twitter.

Despite those adoptions, the shelter is filled to capacity at the moment, Vermette said Monday. He was making calls across the country to find a home for a 10-month-old puppy he couldn't take in.

Vermette said the well-behaved dog is "an ambassador for the breed" but would probably "die on Saturday" without a new home. Happily, he found a foster home later in the day, saving the pup's life.

However, many dogs still await adoption. For more information, call Mike's Dog House at (386) 328-7789 or go to www.mikesdoghouse.org.

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