

Outlook promising for 2 Vick dogs

Dogs visit Richmond shelter; hopes high for future adoption

BY FRANK GREEN
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Far from the peril and deprivation of Bad Newz Kennels, 47 pit bulls are now scattered across the country in new, if not permanent, homes — two of them in Richmond.

"I think they've both been adjusting really well," said Susan Kelly with the Richmond Animal League, selected last month to handle four of the surviving dogs seized at Michael Vick's compound in rural Surry County last year.

Vick was ordered to pay \$928,073 for the past, present and long-term care of the 47 dogs. RAL is to get some \$5,000 for each of the four dogs for medical and other expenses, Kelly said. She believes the amounts are flexible, should one

Fine, but no jail time

• Man who cooperated in Vick dogfighting investigation gets three years probation. Page B3

dog require more than \$5,000 and another less. RAL has sent two of the dogs to foster care in another state on the East Coast. The other two are in a temporary foster home in the Richmond area.

Yesterday Alf, white and brown, and Gracie, black,

played and lounged with each other at the RAL facility just off Midlothian Turnpike. The dogs were brought to the site to meet the media.

Both are small pit bull mixes believed to be 1 to 2 years old. Gracie has been spayed and Alf neutered.

It is hoped both will be ready for adoption within a few months. But people interested in adopting them need not call RAL, Kelly said. Prospective

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EVA RUSSO/TIMES

Gracie and Alf, two of the pit bull terriers rescued from Michael Vick's dogfighting operation in Surry County, were photographed yesterday at the Richmond Animal League.

Vick dogs

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adopters will not be told they are "Michael Vick dogs," until after their applications are approved.

"These aren't celebrity dogs to us. These are just more RAL dogs that we want to find loving homes for," Kelly said. As far as is known, neither dog was ever fought. Only Gracie is expected to stay in the Richmond area.

Gracie is already in her permanent foster home in Richmond until and if she is adopted. Alf will be going to his out-of-state foster home next week, Kelly said.

RAL and seven other groups — some as far away as California — that were given the dogs by federal court order were able to show the animals to the media and talk about them in detail for the first time yesterday.

Six of the 53 dogs seized on Vick's former Surry County property last April have died or been euthanized. Alf and Gracie were held at



Voice your views

Would you adopt a dog rescued from a dogfighting ring? Go to inRich.com to comment on this story and read complete coverage of the case against Michael Vick.

shelters in Suffolk and Virginia Beach before RAL got them.

Jemi Hodge, an animal-behavior specialist/trainer who is on the RAL board of directors, has been working with Gracie and Alf for two weeks.

Hodge, owner of K-9 Consultants Inc., said, "They're doing great. They're very shy, but very sweet and get along fine with cats and other dogs. No aggression whatsoever, no fighting instincts being shown, nothing."

When they first arrived, she said, it appeared they had never played with other dogs. "I'm here to make sure they are placeable, which I feel they are," Hodge said.

All of the dogs must receive special training before they can be adopted. Right now

Gracie and Alf are being taught basic obedience, she said.

Valparaiso University School of Law professor Rebecca J. Huss, the court-appointed guardian for the dogs, recommended they be sent to RAL and the other organizations.

The only other Virginia organization selected, Animal Rescue of Tidewater in Chesapeake, received one dog. The largest group of dogs, 22, were flown to the Best Friends Animal Society's 33,000-acre sanctuary in Utah from Richmond on Jan. 2.

Reached by telephone yesterday, Huss said, "Gracie is going to be quite the couch potato, I think, and Alf is so playful. . . . They are two of my favorites — great dogs!" A 1992 graduate of the University of Richmond Law School, Huss is an animal-law expert.

She first met and evaluated the dogs last October after they had been in shelters for several months.

She said, "we're waiting to see how they adjust, but all indications now are they are going to thrive in their new environments."

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