



Puppy Love: Valentines for Chained Dogs Hope to Inspire a Change of Heart

By Rebecca Simmons

Each valentine was unique. Some were decorated with carefully cut-out construction paper hearts or edged with lace, others adorned with sprinkles of glitter or Crayon drawings.

These valentine cards weren't for fifth grade crushes or high school sweethearts. They were for dogs.

Last Valentine's Day, Dogs Deserve Better, a Pennsylvania-based non-profit dedicated to bringing dogs out of the backyard and into the home, celebrated Have a Heart for Chained Dogs Week by sending more than 3,000 handmade valentines to families whose dog was chained or penned.

"We thought sending a valentine to the family dog living in the backyard would be a touching way to educate people—to perhaps open their hearts to the information we'd provided, especially if that valentine was made by a child," said Tammy Sneath Grimes, founder and executive director of Dogs Deserve Better.

In 2002, the year that Dogs Deserve Better created the program, the organization sent out 250 valentines. This year, the group hopes to mail more than 4,500 cards during Have a Heart for Chained Dogs Week, February 7-14.

The valentines are created by volunteers, mostly children, and then mailed or delivered by Dogs Deserve Better—along with a brochure and dog treat coupon—to addresses provided by animal lovers in the United States, Canada, and Australia.

Those who ask that valentines be sent to chained dogs in their community remain anonymous, allowing concerned citizens who may otherwise be too shy to confront their neighbors about the issue to speak up for chained dogs. While Dogs Deserve Better has no way of knowing how each recipient reacts to the valentine packet, there are several examples of families voluntarily finding another home for their dog, placing him up for adoption at the local shelter, or bringing him inside to be with the family. Lori Smith, an animal lover who last year submitted an address in her area where a chained dog lived, drove by the home one afternoon just before Valentine's Day and

saw a little girl reading the valentine to the dog chained outside.

"Just seeing that brought tears to my eyes, and I cried the whole way home," Smith wrote in a letter to Dogs Deserve Better. "I had noticed this dog for two years. It always broke my heart to see him, and I always kept this dog in my prayers. Two days later, I passed the house again, and the dog was no longer on the chain!"

Have a Heart for Chained Dogs Week helps to educate not only the families who receive a valentine, but also the volunteers who create the cards.

"This program is so exciting because it educates from both sides," said Grimes. "The students and volunteers who are making the valentines realize that dogs should not live their life on the end of the chain, ostracized from the family, and the program educates the families who receive the valentines."

Raising awareness among dog guardians, children, and others is a huge accomplishment for Dogs Deserve Better, but the ultimate goal—granting a reprieve to the dogs living lonely lives in a pen or at the end of chain—delivers the most reward. And the beauty of the program is that it's all accomplished with a bit of construction paper called a valentine.

Contact Dogs Deserve Better

Please remember to include your own contact information when contacting Dogs Deserve Better:

Dogs Deserve Better
P.O. Box 23
Tipton, PA 16684
1-877-636-1408 (toll-free)
814-941-7447

email:
info@dogsdeservebetter.org
www.DogsDeserveBetter.org

Give a dog a cell phone

(CNN) -- It's one of the biggest sources of guilt for a dog owner -- not spending enough time with their four-legged friends.

Now, a U.S. company has developed a device in a bid to reduce those feelings of despair, by inventing a cell phone so that dogs and their owners can communicate when they are away from each other.

The PetsCell, measuring 12.5cm (5 inches) by 7.5cm (3 inches), is shaped like a bone and is attached to the dog's collar. It works in much the same way as a conventional mobile phone.

The owner dials their pooch's number and after one ring, it automatically connects to the phone on the dog's collar, allowing the dog to hear its master's voice, transmitted out of a speaker built into the collar-piece.

If the dog barks in response, the owner will hear it through their own telephone, creating a dog-owner telephone "conversation."

PetsCell inventor Canadian Cameron Robb is now director of PetsMobility, the Arizona-based company producing the device.

As well as acting as a catalyst for absentee owners to communicate with their mutts, Robb has also had interest in the device from search-and-rescue and hunting groups.

He believes it would also be useful to help find lost dogs.

"The ability to talk to your pet from a distance on the pet's own cellular phone is definitely novel," he said.

"But I envision the PetsCell having search-and-rescue, military, guide dog or even potentially patient and elderly care applications, to name a few."

The device costs about £100 (\$188) and is expected to be on sale in the U.S. within the next six months, and in Britain by the end of the year.

Tim Miles, chief veterinary adviser for Britain's RSPCA, said micro-chipping dogs was a better way of keeping track of dogs.

Micro chipping involves a vet inserting a tiny device, about the size of a grain of rice, under the dog's skin.

If the dog is lost or stolen, dog wardens, the RSPCA or a vet can scan it for a microchip, which can immediately provide them with your contact details.

"The mobile phone could be removed by dog thieves, but a microchip is a reliable, permanent form of identification linking the animal to you," Miles said.



The PetsCell allows dogs to talk to their owners via telephone.