

Michele Higham

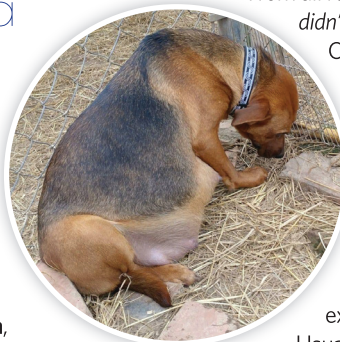
committed guardian

Paw Paws Pet Rescue

“every dog has its own journey. every single animal that was put on this earth is a different individual—from dogs to horses to chickens. they need someone to look out for them. it’s a commitment.”

After a spending a few hours with the woman who spoke those words—talking with and photographing her amongst the 12 rescue and foster dogs and 9 foster puppies in her care—I can confidently say **Michele Higham**, cofounder (with her husband, Kent) of **Paw Paws Pet Rescue** (PPPR) is one of the most committed people I’ve ever met. She normally gets up between 1:30 am and 2:30 am (you read that right, sleepyhead) in order to get everything she needs to get done, done, and everyone she needs to take care of, taken care of.

Michele and Kent started PPPR about six years



ago as a foster-based rescue, mainly helping large-breed medical-needs dogs—those in the back rooms of shelters no one sees because they’re hurt or sick, or those from special cases. These kind of dogs don’t need another human to flake on them or pass them over because their journey has taken a difficult, arduous, or inconvenient turn. They need a commitment.

Kyleigh Rose is a prime example of one of those dogs. Kyleigh was on a property with 55 other dogs in rural Georgia, 30 of which were pregnant.

From all reports, the owner of the property just *didn’t know* about spaying and neutering.

One photo of Kyleigh was all Michele needed in order to welcome her into the rescue, “Kirby, a rescuer we work with in Georgia, sent me the picture and I said, *get her*. I didn’t ask questions and I didn’t know exactly where she was going to go. She just looked sick and I couldn’t see anything except her holding her head in shame.

Usually I have a plan in place—I had no plan—but I didn’t really think we’d awarded the honor of getting her. I just wanted to hug her and give her a chance to know what a warm home is—what a family is—what love feels like.” Michele knew nothing about Kyleigh’s medical status. She didn’t know she if she was pregnant (spoiler alert—she was), she didn’t know if she could walk (she



Happy freedom ride!



Awesome mama to 9 puppies!



The first of Kyleigh's puppies is adopted!

couldn't, seemingly because she had low muscle mass from repeated pregnancies). Michele didn't know exactly *what* she and the rescue were committing to, financially or otherwise. All she knew was that Kyleigh needed help.

Michele worked with Jennifer Hardin of **Dirt Road Doggies Rescue** in Georgia, to get Kyleigh to PPPR. Jennifer had been working with the owner of the 55 dogs to help get them rescued. (Thanks to Jennifer—there are now just six dogs left on the property an they're all spayed or neutered!) "At that point, after going back and forth with Jennifer for three hours, we found out that Kyleigh was pregnant and couldn't walk and I thought *Oh no, now what?* We don't normally do

puppies ... what's the plan now? And she ended up coming here." Here, being Michele and Kent's home.

"She wouldn't eat when she first got here. She was an outside dog that had never been inside of a home, so she didn't know what to do. The first night I laid outside with her—bug spray and a blanket—with the door open, so she knew it was okay to come in if she wanted to. I had to gain her trust; she didn't trust anything, except what she knew before, and that was all gone. By the second night she felt comfortable enough to come in. The third night she slept next to my bed and ... then she started panting. We'd had a vet appointment scheduled at 11:45 am the next day anyway to

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have her evaluated, but as we were loading up, puppies started coming out!" Kyleigh had nine beautiful, healthy puppies in seven hours.

Thanks to Michele and Kent's love and patience, Kyleigh has now acclimated to indoor living and is not only walking, but running and playing with her pups. She's a great mama, but this will be her last litter, as she will be spayed by the time this is printed. And guess what? She has found a home and a family to love her forever! "She's not going anywhere. She's my girl. We're Kyleigh failures." Yup. She's staying with Michele and Kent. But the puppies—they *do* need homes! At press time, there were still five of Kyleigh's pups available, so if you're interested in being part of Kyleigh's family, please contact Paw Paws Pet Rescue.

At the end of our time together, I asked Michele, *What puts a smile on your face?* "Besides my

grandson and granddaughter—these dogs. These dogs. Because they've saved me. In return, I've been able to give back to them. And when they're well enough to move on to the next part of their journey, they're saving someone else and making room for another dog." Kent concurs, "The dogs make her happiest. You could ask her to ride the Harley or go on vacation, nah. Go save a dog, yah." Yes, if there's one thing Michele Higham is, it's committed. ■

Michele and Kent will be moving their home and the rescue base to a larger property late this year. They're looking forward to having more space for intake/evaluation and the housing of dogs, but Paw Paws will still be a foster-based rescue—fosters are always needed! Please go to pawpawspetrescue.org for more information about fostering, adopting, or donating to this wonderful organization!

Learn more about Kyleigh's story and see more photos of her and the puppies on Facebook: [A New Life for Kyleigh Rose](#).

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