

# Couple fosters military pups

- By Debbie Blank The Herald-Tribune  
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Joanne Schrimpf and her husband Bob are fostering two beagles for a U.S. Army soldier on overseas deployment.

Photo by Debbie Blank  
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When Bob and Joanne Schrimpf's dog was dying 18 months ago, "we just couldn't picture doing another 16-year commitment, but we were dog people, and knew we'd miss the walks and (sound of) nails on the floor."

The Batesville woman looked online into fostering pups, came across the Web site for Guardian Angels for Soldiers Pet and completed an application. "They interviewed us by phone," then officials worked on finding a dog for the couple to nurture.

The Schrimps turned down two pit bulls, a boxer and a dalmatian, due to their sizes and because they were traveling last winter. Soon the GASP Kentucky liaison got in touch with Carol Highhouse, Guardian Angels for Soldier's Pet Indiana foster coordination liaison. Volunteers were having trouble placing two beagles adopted from rescue agencies in New York and North Carolina who belonged to a U.S. Army soldier stationed at Fort Knox.

"I can do two beagles," she decided. The couple drove to Kentucky to meet the service member and her pets. "We got to see her house and what her standards of care are. They were very sweet dogs. You could tell she was checking us out, too." Once the deployment date was solid, "she came up with her friend's truck piled high with beagle equipment" and the dogs to drop them off. "I gave her a private moment" in the backyard. "It was emotional."

The owner is expected to remain in the Middle East for six to nine months. "We hope to be just really good babysitters of them with the expectation these are her dogs."

"There are very serious contracts and paperwork .... If she gets killed in action, there are ways that's handled, too. She has named the person who would take the dogs long term." Schrimp realizes, "The soldiers are doing important tasks at great risks."

The male, microchipped dogs, are about three years old. At 27 pounds, Tucker is the smaller one. Clancy, with a bigger head, weighs in at around 35 pounds. "I can pick them both up under each arm," she reports.

During the first days in their new surroundings, "we were all sniffing each other out. You could tell they were bewildered ... they missed her and were waiting for her to come back." The beagles' play "turned relatively rough" one day that first week in mid-summer. They were separated by Jake Taylor, Portsmouth, Ohio, whom Joanne Schrimpf had coached in swimming while the couple lived there for five years. Taylor is spending the summer at their home while he performs a Berea College internship in Cincinnati.

"That was the only bad night," recalls the friendly woman. She spent it watching reruns of "The Dog Whisperer" for guidance.

Friend Pam Staat gave the dogs welcome-to-Batesville presents. Schrimpf observes, "They take the squeaker out of any toy. Then out comes the stuffing." Luckily only toys have been destroyed and not human belongings. While their owner jogged with the duo, "I'm just going on walks with them" at least twice a day. "They've gained several pounds, but I lost several!"

The biggest challenge in caring for the dogs? She replies, "My hate of bunnies that are going to disrupt my day." When the beagles spot one, "It gets so loud. They howl. It's just dreadful."

"We've gotten several e-mails from the soldier's father," who was in the military as well. He wrote that "her knowing that the dogs are comfortable in allowing her to perform her mission more effectively." The couple and servicemember e-mail back and forth, and photos will be sent soon.

The soldier reimburses the Schrimpfs for any expenses, such as food, medicines and vet bills. "She sends me a check every month."

Now that the dogs have settled in, "They're much better behaved than I expected. It was a nice match."

Taking care of these temporary pets "really does fill a void .... We do like having a dog around." While her husband, an ear, nose and throat physician who practices in Batesville and Martinsville, initially was hesitant about fostering canines, now "he's up early with them and feeding them. He pretends like he's complaining about it, but he's really enjoying them. I'll find them sitting on his lap while he's reading."

According to her, "The responsibility is awesome. Her first dog died (of cancer) while she was deployed a few years ago and it was devastating to her. I recognize I've got to have them delivered back to her in one piece." Local dog trainer Laura Losacker has helped the foster mom get better control of the beagles so they don't escape. The owner, who calls them The Houdini Boys because of their ability to disappear, advised the Schrimpfs it's not hard to find them. "If they get loose, they will be baying. You just have to follow the noise."

When the time comes, Joanne Schrimpf predicts it will be difficult to give the dogs back. "But I also realize it will be very fulfilling to know we were able to help this soldier ... Missions are hard, but you do them. Our mission is to support her."

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How to help • Guardian Angels for Soldier's Pet has been "supporting our military, veterans and their beloved pets since 2005." It organizes a foster home program available in all 50 states for soldiers deploying for combat, peacekeeping or humanitarian missions. • GASP offers two programs - foster homes and military pet assistance. The nonprofit also has one major project, a military, veteran and pet sanctuary in Gatesville, Texas. • Persons can help by making donations, volunteering or fostering pets. Info: 812-277-7023 or [www.guardianangelsforsoldierspet.org](http://www.guardianangelsforsoldierspet.org). • Pet Foster Families are also needed by the Rushville Animal Shelter. For more information, call 932-4754.