

# Stamp of success on shelter dog

Canine adopted from New Milford animal shelter promotes Postal Service spay/neuter campaign

By Joe Gould  
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Kirby, who was adopted by the Reynolds' family in Ridgefield through the Animal Welfare Society in New Milford, will appear on a U.S. postage stamp in September. Conor Reynolds, 15, appears in the picture with Kirby.

The News-Times/Carol Kaliff

Kirby is one dog no postman can run away from.

Never mind that he's a quick runner. This frisky border collie-Australian shepherd mix will be on postage stamps come September.

The playful, charismatic pooch's story is a rags-to-riches tale. Once, Kirby lived in an animal shelter. Now he's got a loving family, a home and he's on the verge of fame.

"A person has to be dead for 25 years to be on a stamp," said Sally Anderson-Bruce, the photographer who captured a young Kirby for the stamp. "Elvis had to wait 25 years. But not Kirby."

During the summer of 2000, the U.S. Postal Service hired Anderson-Bruce, a New Milford-based commercial photographer, to take pictures for its spay and neuter campaign. In 1997, her pictures had appeared on the popular American Dolls stamp.

At first, Anderson-Bruce had taken pictures of purebreds, focusing on breeders and their pets, but "they looked too much like stuffed animals."

"They were too cute, too perfect," she said. "I thought, 'Why don't we take pictures of real animals in a real shelter?'"

By arrangement with the Animal Welfare Society's New Milford shelter, Anderson-Bruce shot pictures of abandoned animals for several days. She'd picked the shelter specifically for its no-kill policy.

One morning, she spotted Kirby and his brother, another charismatic puppy. It was magic, she recalled.

"Kirby was just fabulous. It was his face. It was very expressive," she said. "There were two dogs in that litter. I was surprised (the Postal Service) chose Kirby. He has a diagonal line across his face and the other one had freckles. They just liked the appearance of Kirby the best."

That same day, the Reynolds family took him home to Ridgefield. And again, Kirby's brother got passed over.

"I was set to choose the other one," said Conor Reynolds, 15, "and then I

threw a ball out to them. And rather than go after the ball, he started playing around with Kirby. Kirby went after the ball."

(Don't worry. A good home adopted the bespeckled dog, Anderson-Bruce said.)

Conor, who was 13 at the time, had wanted a herding dog for its Frisbee-catching ability. "I liked that they were so fast. I think I wanted to be a Frisbee gold medal winner or something."

A year passed. Kirby settled in at the Reynolds' five-acre spread. He befriended their three cats and golden retriever, Shelby, until her recent death.

Kirby and Conor love to play together, and he's been teaching Kirby to catch a flying disc.

While never formally trained, Kirby fetches the newspaper, responds to verbal commands, and can recognize hand signals while out on wilderness hikes.

He loves outdoors, said Conor's mother, Jill. "He herds deer, and he herds the cats, too."

It was quite a surprise when they got a call a few months ago from the Postal Service telling them their pooch would be on a stamp and that the stamp would be unveiled on "The Price is Right" by host Bob Barker, a spay-neuter champion.

The stamp will be available to the public sometime in September, postal officials said. A kitten from a Cornwall-based shelter is on the other stamp in the series. They will join the ranks of other issues-related stamps such as breast cancer awareness.

"We signed a release when we picked him up," Jill Reynolds said. "She said it might be one or two years. It was just one of those things. We thought, 'That's never going to happen.'"

Then it happened. On TV. "They had this huge billboard-sized picture of the two of them. The postmaster of Los Angeles introduced the stamp."

Yet the Reynolds family didn't need a stamp to realize their dog is a star.

"It was just a nice bonus. We're lucky he doesn't know what's going on," Jill Reynolds joked, "so he doesn't get a big head."