



**MEDIA CONTACT:**

**RELEASE** Dawn Kemper  
**2016**

(847)529-2025 office

media\_relations@adoptaseniorpet.com

**FOR IMMEDIATE**

**September 1,**

---

**Love of Senior Dog Inspires \$500,000 Capital Campaign Donation from John and Rita Canning**

PALATINE IL– Young at Heart Pet Rescue’s future adoption center just for senior pets in Woodstock, IL will soon be named “Smokey’s Haven” thanks to a \$500,000 donation by the Canning family in memory of their beloved senior dog, Smokey.

By all accounts, Smokey the Labrador led a charmed life. Loved by his entire family since just a pup, he spent twelve years enjoying adventures with the Canning family. From trips to Wisconsin, holidays with their six kids and eventual ten grandchildren, and summer afternoons catching Frisbees off the diving board at the pool, Smokey was one of the family. As Smokey began to slow down in his senior years, it was then that John and Rita Canning became more aware of the plight of older pets and the challenges that can arise when caring for them.

When John and Rita Canning learned about Young at Heart Pet Rescue’s mission to rescue, care for, and find loving homes for senior pets in need, the focus of the organization really hit home.

“Young at Heart’s mission struck us at a unique time in our lives,” said John Canning. “Smokey had recently passed away, and when we learned the organization focused on animals that are seven years of age or older, their mission really resonated with us.”

John and Rita’s love of Smokey would often bring them to discussions about building a shelter for dogs when John retired. So when they learned of the organization’s quest to build a shelter designed just for senior pets, they were instantly drawn to the idea. “The similarity of what Young at Heart wants to do and what we had talked about as a family really blew me away. We didn’t really think about a shelter just for the older dogs and cats,” said Rita. “We absolutely love the idea and are so happy to be a part of it. It was meant to be.”

The love of animals is a family affair. Melissa Canning, daughter-in-law to John and Rita, has a huge

passion for animals and is involved with other animal welfare groups. Young at Heart touched her because it concentrates on senior pets that she feels really deserves love and attention in their golden years.

"I have always had such a passion for animals, ever since my parents adopted a shelter cat when I was one year old," said Melissa. As Regional Sales Manager for Handguards, wife and mother of one son, three cats, one dog and many fish, Melissa explains, "Animals are all so special and I feel that we need to be their voice."

Melissa is excited about the organization's future as she becomes more involved with Young at Heart, joining the organization's board of directors. "First of all, I love the name Young at Heart. It speaks volumes. These animals are young at heart and need our help supporting them into their golden years."

The Inverness couple and their philanthropy are renowned for the transformative impact in their community. Among the many causes they support, each has one that they are most passionate about.

Rita Canning is Chairman of WINGS, which offers transitional housing and support services for abused and homeless women and their children. She opened WINGS Safe House, the first domestic violence shelter in Chicago's northwest suburbs, which currently serves 45 women and children. Through their own personal giving and solicitation of others, the Cannings have raised over \$10 million to support WINGS.

John Canning's passion is the Big Shoulders Fund, a nonprofit that has helped Chicago's children in need achieve their dreams through access to a quality, values-based education. Each year, John personally provides over 100 inner city students with scholarships. And as Co-Chairman of the Big Shoulders Fund, John has helped raise over \$100 million for Chicago's inner-city parochial schools, which serve 24,000 students, 80 percent minority and 62 percent from families that are living at or below the poverty level.

With all of their accomplishments, the Cannings take great pride in their contribution to Young at Heart.

"We learned very quickly that Young at Heart is a class act. There is strong leadership and a very passionate group of people running a good operation. It is very obvious that they love senior pets. This gift brings our love of Smokey and the love of senior pets together," said Rita Canning.

"The Cannings' gift will have an extraordinary impact on the lives of homeless senior pets, and it has inspired us all," said Dawn Kemper, executive director and founder of Young at Heart. "We are so excited to build an even brighter future for senior pets, and to be so close to opening the doors to our very special adoption center."

Young at Heart's adoption center is set to open in mid-2017 on the organization's eight acres in unincorporated Woodstock Illinois, 50 miles northwest of Chicago. It will house approximately 50 senior dogs and cats in a cageless environment, complete with screened-in porches for the cats, large outdoor play yards for the dogs, and heated floors for the animals in a homelike setting.

Young at Heart is in the final stretch of their capital campaign to build a shelter solely for senior pets, with just \$100,000 left to raise. Animal lovers are encouraged to make a donation in memory of their own beloved pets. Naming opportunities are available. For more information on Young at Heart's capital campaign, visit [adoptaseniorpet.com](http://adoptaseniorpet.com).

## About Young at Heart Pet Rescue

Young at Heart™ pet rescue is a 501c3 not for profit organization that believes that Love Has No Age Limit™. Young at Heart is committed to saving the lives of homeless senior pets, especially those at risk of unnecessary euthanasia in area shelters. Based in the Northwest suburbs of Chicago, the organization only rescues and adopts out dogs and cats over the age of seven years, placing hundreds of senior pets into loving homes each year since its founding in 2005. In addition to placement through adoption, we offer a peaceful sanctuary life for those that are less adoptable. With your support, Young at Heart gives older dogs and cats another chance to enjoy the twilight of their lives through rescue, foster, adoption and sanctuary. Young at Heart is supported solely through contributions, grants, bequests, investments, and adoption fees. For more information or to view our current animals available for adoption, please visit [www.adoptaseniorpet.com](http://www.adoptaseniorpet.com).

###