

CANINE CORNER

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Old Friends Senior Dog Sanctuary



Tucked away in mid-Tennessee in the town of Mount Juliet is the world's largest senior-specific dog sanctuary dedicated to the care and rehoming of older dogs.

The Old Friends Senior Dog Sanctuary (ofsd.org) was founded in 2010 at the home of Zina and Michael Goodin. The growing need saw the sanctuary move a couple of times thanks, in part, to unfriendly neighbours and zoning restrictions, moving into its purpose-built compound in 2021.

The PAWvillions, as it is known, has its own veterinary clinic, physical therapy and fitness area, kennels with outdoor exercise yards, a commercial-grade laundry, and a walking trail. The sanctuary is home to 120 senior dogs with another 500 having found their forever home in the sanctuary's Geezer Guardians programme.

The dogs brought to Mount Juliet are those deemed nearly or fully 'unadoptable' because of age, disability, behavioural problems, or illness but who are able to enjoy a quality of life with the right care. Through donations, Old Friends provides the cover and cost of all medical care and prescription medications and supplements. Forever fosters (Geezer Guardians) must live within a 100-mile radius of the sanctuary and have the obligation to provide food, enrichment and love for their Geezer.

Tours of the facility are available on selected days and times; my tour guide, Sally, is an experienced Old Friends volunteer who lives a stone's throw up the road from the facility. She explains that the State of Tennessee does not have any regulations for the neutering of dogs with no requirements for dog licensing. This leads to a large population of homeless dogs; some dogs will live on the streets for their entire lives while abandonment of older dogs when their health or behavioural needs become challenging is also common.

Many rescue groups in the southern states of the US, including Tennessee, transport shelter dogs to shelters in the north, where animal control regulations have reduced the number of homeless dogs. Old Friends does its part by taking the older dogs.

In designated areas of the PAWvillions, you will meet dogs who are 'people or dog selective.' One such dog was Iris, a nine-year-old Pit Bull. Sally says, "There are many people in these parts who bring bull breeds into this world, do damage, and then leave us to pick up the pieces."

The sanctuary is also home to dogs with physical disabilities. Henry, for example, had to have both of his eyes removed due to glaucoma. He spends his days sleeping, happy for visitors to pay him attention so long as he is not expected to get up. A Greyhound cross named Savannah suffers from the condition of megaesophagus and needs to be fed sitting up in a bailey chair. She's one dog who will be a lifelong resident at the sanctuary because of her special care needs.

Old Friends also makes special arrangements for "bonded pairs" — dogs who share a special relationship and should not be separated. One such pair is Otis, a Pug, and Rosie, a Chihuahua (see main photo).

The advantages of a purpose-built facility are many. Because the sanctuary cares for many dogs who have health conditions, having an on-site veterinary clinic with a staff vet means not only a cost savings but also more rapid medical care. The sanctuary's medicine cabinet is also impressive, with labelled shelves for each dog. Full-time staff prepare meals for the dogs along with their oral medications. Preparation, feeding and cleaning is a four-hour exercise, twice per day.

Floor cleaning is always a challenge in a kennel environment; the PAWvillions are equipped with plumbing connections in the walls of each block. Simply attach a hose to the high-pressure connection and turn it on to wash down the floors, which have been designed to self-drain and dry. No more sponge mops and slippery floor hazards for people and dogs, and much cleaner floors.

Although new compared to some animal rescue organisations, Old Friends has a following of 1.7 million people on Facebook which continues to grow thanks, in part, to the free *Old Friends Dog Game*, downloadable from the Apple Store and Google Play. Programmed by Runaway, a Dunedin-based game developer and publisher, players create their own sanctuary and care and rehabilitate older dogs.

The Old Friends mission is summed up in a single sentence:

We do not concern ourselves with the quantity of time that they have left, rather the quality of the life that we can provide them for that time. 🐾

