

'THE DOG HEALERS'

4/21/17

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BRANFORD » From the early March day the dog that came to be known as Hope was found shambling along Route 1 in Branford, emaciated and near death, well-wishers from as far away as Texas, Hawaii, and California have sent toys, teddy bears, and blankets. A pizzeria raised \$16,000 for her care. A Branford elementary school, a tattoo artist, and a jeweler also chipped in.

And that's just a small sampling of the massive response from all corners of the globe.

It's an outpouring that could have been forecast by Branford author Mark Winik, who will be promoting his award-winning book, "The Dog Healers," at the Connecticut Humane Society Faux Fur Ball. The event, to raise funds for lifesaving medical care for pets in need, will be held at the Hilton Mystic on Saturday, April 22.

Winik's engaging story, about a healer named Isabella who can cure ailing dogs and transform broken race horses into champions with her skilled hands and soothing tones, and featuring a colorful cast of two- and four-legged characters, has as its theme the extraordinary bond between dogs and humans.

With each restoration to health of a canine in distress, Isabella says, "I have learned to treasure how dogs lift our spirits and touch our souls."

She might as well have been summoning Laura Burban, director of Branford's Dan Cosgrove Animal Shelter, who's been keeping Hope's legion of fans closely apprised of each development on the shelter's Facebook page ever since a good Samaritan brought her there on March 6. (She was moved to Branford Veterinary Hospital upon intake and then to Pieper Memorial Veterinary



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Mark Winik at home with Chickie and Paco.

Hospital in Middletown for the next two weeks.)

"When we encountered Hope it was heartbreak and anger," Burban wrote in a post on Tuesday, March 21, on a day Hope had once again rallied after having become lethargic and spiking a fever. Below the post, a photo pictures the gentle-looking animal sprawled on a blanket, her ribs still sticking out, despite over two weeks of

24-hour care.

"Watching Hope progress has brought us happiness and joy," Burban continued. "And with all of the calls, emails, letters, and people stopping by the shelter with donations and gifts on behalf of Hope—this has brought us a renewed faith in not only the work we do, but for all the good people who are out there."

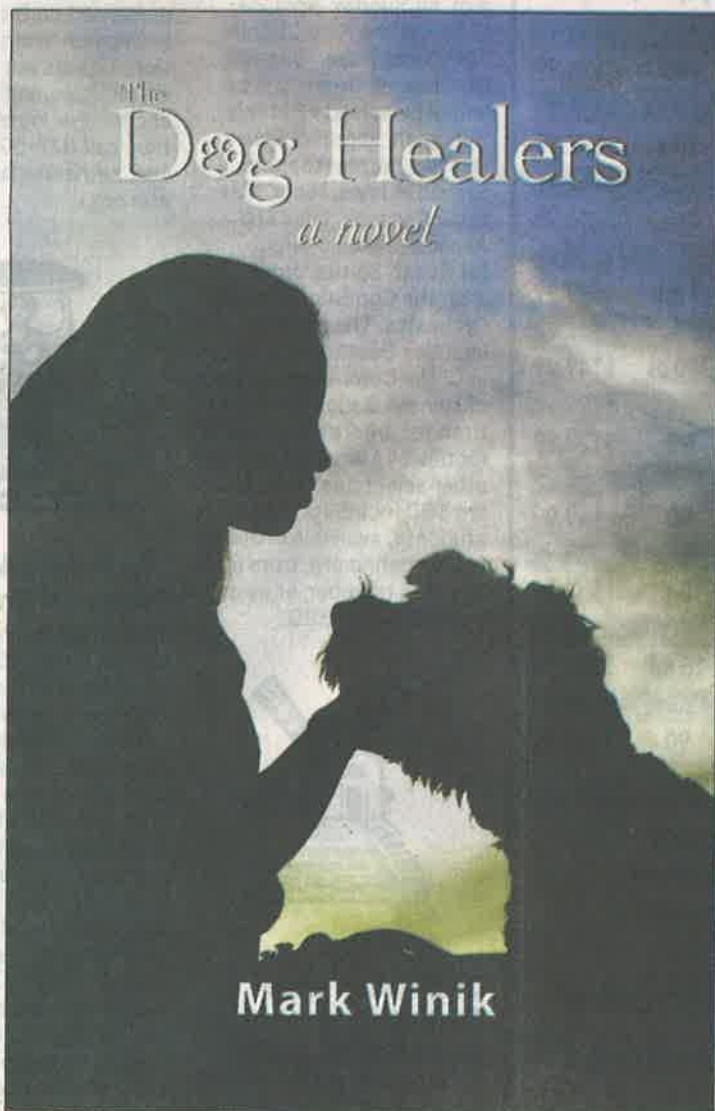
That the post was shared 999 times and included comments from a woman in Arizona and a man in Michigan is only natural to Winik, 65, who, along with his wife Norma, founded the Short Beach community dog park, the first of its kind on the Shoreline, and is a regular presence there with his wheaten terrier Paco and whoodle Chickie.

"Hope has touched people's hearts everywhere," he said. "Her will to live is encouraged by those who deeply care about her well-being. Through this process, their own spirits are lifted."

The Connecticut Humane Society Faux Fur Ball will be held at the Hilton Mystic, 20 Coogan Blvd, Mystic, from 6 to 10 p.m. on Saturday, April 22. For tickets, \$80, and information, visit <http://bit.ly/2oHmViY>.

"The Dog Healers" is available at Branford Book & Card and on Amazon.

To make donations to Hope's care or to the Dan Cosgrove Animal Shelter, visit paypal.com at branfordanimalshelter.org or mail checks or supplies to 749 E. Main St. Branford 06405.



NEW HAVEN REGISTER FILE PHOTO

The novel "The Dog Healers" could have predicted the outpouring of support for Hope, the dog that was found starving to death in Branford.