

National News

AWARDS FOR RESCUERS



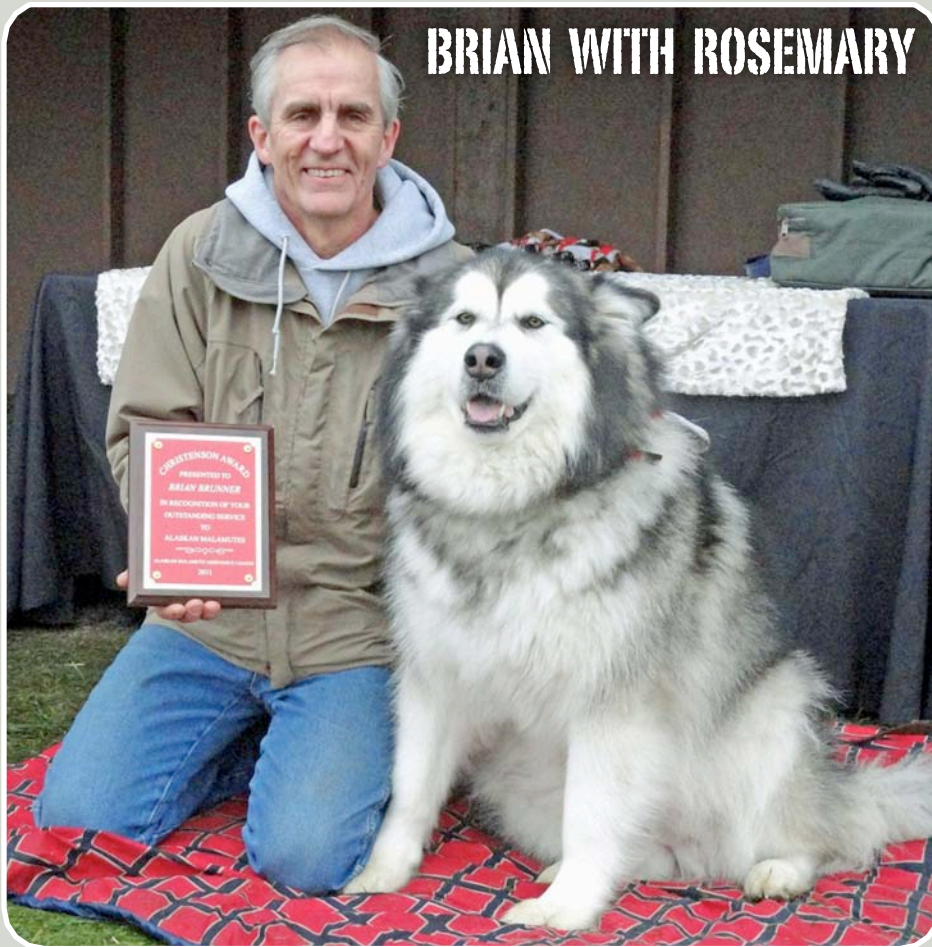
Diesel is one of the lucky mals Brian Brunner helped rescue and transport.

MALMOBILE
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HONK & WAVE! WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO A
NEW AND HAPPY LIFE

“Without our unsung heroes, we could not save the dogs who mean so much to us all.”

Presented annually at the AMCA National Specialty Banquet by the Alaskan Malamute Assistance League, the prestigious Christenson Memorial Award recognizes those rescuers who always work but are seldom in the limelight. Meet this year’s dual and deserving recipients: Brian Brunner and Colleen Belanger.



BRIAN WITH ROSEMARY



ARCTIC



MAX

Congratulations Brian Brunner, Malamute Rescuer and Transporter Extraordinaire!

Editor's Note: *The Washington Alaskan Malamute Adoption League (WAMAL) Board of Directors nominated Brian for the Christenson Award. Excerpts from their nomination letter are reprinted here with permission.*

Brian has been a volunteer for WAMAL since about 2002, but has been involved with malamutes one way or another for most of his life. From Cheena, his first malamute at age five, to his current pack of five rescue dogs, Brian has known and loved the breed his entire life. The mal that really started it all though was Kira, who came into the lives of Brian and his family in 1994, at a time when both the family and the dog needed rescuing.

In June of 1994, Brian and his wife Barb tragically lost their 12-year old son Ryan in a rafting accident on the Wenatchee River. In August of that year, Barb and their other son Troy were leaving QFC Grocery Store and saw a big, dirty, scruffy looking female mal sitting there just looking around watching people with a blank emotionless stare, the one that says the dog is tired, has seen too much, and not all of it was good. The managers were nervous about her and were going to call animal control, so Barb called the dog, and she followed them to the car. They got home, called Brian at Boeing, and told him the story, and he said,

**WAMAL
nominated
Brian for the
Christenson
Award**

"Color her Gone!!" Knowing about mals, he knew that this was not the time to have a destabilizing, unpredictable, stubborn, independent minded force of nature in their lives, but Kira worked her way into their hearts and stayed with them for four years, until she died of a malignant tumor. Brian told us, "Well, Kira, who rescued our family when we needed it, in her own way was a very special mal in so many ways..."

Brian has become indispensable to WAMAL since he became an active volunteer. He plays a key role in our volunteer organization by coordinating and leading most of the cross-state transport efforts. In fact, he's so involved, he's now known – probably statewide – as The MalMobile Man. He also coordinates with other rescue groups in the state and will transport any dog of any breed needing re-location; in one transport he had a malamute, a Siberian, and a poodle, all coming from Spokane and Idaho to their new homes in western Washington. He's always able to magically get a transport together in an emergency situation, saving the lives of many dogs that would otherwise have been euthanized. This year alone, he's put 4900 miles on the MalMobile, getting dogs to their new homes.

One of our favorite stories is when he transported six malamute puppies - appropriately called The Snowflake Puppies - and a young male mal named Russell over I-90 at Snoqualmie Pass in mid-April. Traffic came to a dead stop as a result of a surprise snow storm, and there he was stuck in traffic with six puppies in the back of the MalMobile. The pass was closed for a couple of hours, so he had to get the puppies out for a bit of exercise and, unsurprisingly, drew quite a crowd. Being Brian, and always on the lookout for a chance to talk about malamutes and rescue in general, he used the opportunity to not only educate about the breed but to promote the rescue as well. In his words, "I could have adopted all of them out from the back of the truck, right there on the freeway!"

Brian is also one of our Volunteer Mentors, providing training to our Cohort of Dog Walkers, the team of volunteers that makes sure our kenneled rescue dogs get enough exercise and socialization until they move on to their forever homes. He is always available to provide assistance and insight to foster homes and new adoptive families while they work through the first few tough weeks of having a new dog in the house.

Brian consistently amazes us with his willingness to drop whatever he's doing to help and with his dedication to the dogs. He walks them, takes them to the vet, the groomer, to meet prospective adopters, does supply runs for dog food and kennel supplies, drags equipment - kennels, fencing, crates - all over the state to foster homes and new adopters, and of course, transports dogs.

He also has an incredible soft spot for the hard-luck mal, the one that can't catch a break, has been mistreated or misunderstood and needs that little bit of extra time and attention to become the dog it's meant to be. He's worked miracles with a few of the worst cases



SNOWFLAKE PUPS

IN HIS OWN WORDS

BRIAN BRUNNER SHARES STORIES OF SURVIVAL AND HOPE

Diesel was an AKC/CKC registered two-year-old mal who was surrendered to a shelter. A people lover with an absolutely wonderful personality, he jumped out of the truck and met our pack of five, and we all went for a hike in the woods. He had no issues with anything. Ironically, we get these kinds of mals quite often, and you can't understand why.

Arctic was a purebred one-year-old male Siberian picked up as a stray. Just a drop-dead show ready boy, and he knew it! I kept him overnight for a transport connection the next day. Sibe transports always remind me of why I really love my mals. Arctic was a nuclear reactor core of energy! He NEVER stopped. He drove 400 pounds of mals to the back bedroom to get some peace and quiet and REST! I ended up sleeping on the couch with him tethered to the leg, and he FINALLY laid down to sleep!

Max was one of the survivors from a "dog hell" in North Central Montana. Fortunately, there were only eight mals there. My wife Barb and I made two



pups would wander out of their mother's protection, they were killed or eaten by other starving/malnourished dogs. A few were quite timid and shy because of being unfamiliar with people in any context. Not abused physically, but neglected emotionally, socially, and in terms of their health/nutrition/medical care.

I called Max "Five Ears" because they were both split from dog fights. He was a 110 pound social butterfly when he filled out. Max would jump up on my son's shoulders to "wash his face." All six of these rescued dogs went to homes and really have had no issues fitting in with people and other pets.

Successfully rescuing and rehoming mals from such traumatic/horrible circumstances shows me the survivability, resilience, and intelligence of the breed, to adapt and adjust to loving homes, regardless of their inhumane start in life.

The transports I do are the greatest opportunity to see such great mals and to wonder about where they have been, what they have experienced, and what they are thinking. Some want to get an upgrade to "First Class" and jump up in the front seat.

trips to Wallace, Idaho, to get three mals each time they were released. The dogs were all chained out to various junk cars/vehicles on the property. When

and been able to see them move on to a new home. He's also held a couple we couldn't save while they traveled over the Bridge.

When asked about why he does this, Brian said, "Because they trust us, believe in us, and rely on us to keep them safe and ensure they are taken care of properly, and to be their voices when this is not the case. A footnote on an email we may have all seen at times quotes Roger Karas saying, 'Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole!' Somewhere there may be another Kira out there in need of rescue, a dog that helped make our lives whole again when we needed rescue."

*~Sylvia Bailey, WAMAL President
For the Board of Directors of WAMAL*

Clyde would push his head up between the head rest and door pillar and rest his chin on my shoulder when we would go through towns. He seemed to be telling me, "Hey, it's lunch time, and I can see and smell those golden arches over there. I could use a burger!"

Some are quite normal and well behaved, some fairly wild and untrained, and then there are the ones scared spitless that curl up in a ball at the very back of the car and have that wide-eyed look, "What is gonna happen to me now?" And you try to reassure



them, that from now on only good is going to happen to them - because they're with WAMAL and mal rescue.



Congratulations, Colleen Belanger, Outstanding Behavior Trainer and Rescuer!

I would like to express my great appreciation for being given the 2011 Christenson Award. It is an honor to be selected for this award, and I would like to thank those who recommended me.

I was told that I received this award for my behind the scenes work with rescues. I like to do behavior training with the dogs; however, I have little patience in working with owners who wish to give up their pets. I feel that in many cases, there was little thought given before the dog was purchased. Often, it is better if I stay home with the malamutes! I do like to answer questions and help owners who are sincerely trying to find ways to keep their dogs.

I got started in the malamute world wanting a dog who could pull me on skis and carry my backpack. In my late 40's, I contracted middle-age asthma but did not wish to give up my outdoor lifestyle. My husband bought me my first malamute, Ace, for Christmas in 1998. In 1999, Ace was followed by his brother Indy, and then Stoli. Our first rescue mal, Cheeko, moved in in October of 2000.

Cheeko was found tied in the woods with another malamute, with no food, water, or housing. Both had collars grown into their necks and were in really bad shape. Cheeko was part of a big rescue of sled dogs from a so-called commercial sledding business. He is a sweetheart and is still with us at 15 years young!

By July 2001, Cheeko had been joined by rescues Mystic, Rowdy, and Spirit. Sadly, Mystic died in 2009, but the other rescues are still with us. My work with our four rescue dogs made me aware of the plight of other rescues. I was soon in touch with Shirley at Golden Years Alaskan Malamute Rescue and initially helped to transport dogs. I was then asked to foster a rescue, and it blossomed from there. Shirley, Carol, and everyone at Golden Years have been wonderful to work with over the years.

We have fostered many malamutes in the past ten years. They all have stories; I would like to recount two of my favorites.

Remington: A partially blind mal, Remi had peripheral vision only, that

Bear now serves as an assistance dog for a disabled veteran!



was limited at best. Training Remi was like a Helen Keller story gone bad. I had the inspiration to use cooking extracts to teach Remi where the doors and stairs were. He was doing really well, and it looked like a great plan for a couple of days - but suddenly his training went out the window, and he could not find anything. It seems that Stoli, the female that we paired him with, was going around and licking off all the extracts! Remi did eventually learn to get around the house and the grounds - in spite of Stoli. He loved swimming in our pond; we called him a mala-rat. Remi was adopted by a couple in Alberta, Canada. We drove him to the border of Alberta and British Columbia where he met his new family.

Bear: Bear came from the local Humane Society. Big ole Bear was a naughty dog. He would steal any food that was left out on the counter, but he specialized in bread. He would yell at the other dogs. He refused to move when asked to and would grouse and grumble when forced to move. I was asked if I could get Bear used to a scooter, because a disabled veteran who used a scooter wanted Bear. Hmm, where to get a scooter? My bright idea was to use the riding lawn mower! If he could tolerate that, he could do a scooter. So every day, Bear and I roamed the property with the riding mower. Bear has been with his owner for about three years now, and they are getting along famously - although he still steals the bread!

As anyone involved in animal rescue can tell you, it has been challenging at times - but, malamute rescue has also been very rewarding. We have fostered many great and deserving dogs and met some wonderful adopters.

A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR

Colleen has been working with Golden Years Alaskan Malamute Rescue for about nine years now. She's pulled dogs from the east side of Michigan and either fostered them or transported them to us. One dog Colleen fostered several years ago was a young boy they named Remi. He was slowly losing his vision to retinal disease. We normally don't place dogs outside of our geographical region, but Golden Years was contacted by a couple up in British Columbia, Canada. Colleen and Dave were driving up to that area for a dog event, and they took Remi to meet these folks. After many thousands of miles in travel, Remi stayed in Canada. Now, that is real dedication to rescue dogs!

Golden Years Alaskan Malamute Rescue nominated Colleen for the Christenson Award

Another rescue Colleen helped to train and place was Bear, now owned by Karen and Rod VanKampen, who adopted him in July 2009. I had the happy job of taking Bear to his new family after Colleen had trained him to pull Rod's scooter. Bear couldn't wait to get out of my SUV, and the smile on Rod's face was priceless. The funniest "Bear story" happened when Rod and Karen went to an appointment one day, leaving Bear at home with their two cats. When Karen walked in the door, there was rice everywhere, thanks to Bear's pantry raid. Karen told Bear, "I didn't know the cats were getting married!" The work Colleen did to train Bear has clearly touched many lives.

Colleen also fosters for the Illinois Alaskan Malamute Rescue Association and Closer to Home Animal Advocates and does evaluations for all of us. She and her husband Dave are committed to our breed, and we are so glad to have them as volunteers in our program.

~Carol Januszewski, Vice President/Treasurer
Golden Years Alaskan Malamute Rescue



COLLEEN WITH CHEEKO