

Buster, Excelsior's town dog, will be remembered

Many in town knew him, fed him

By John Mugford
EDITOR

Buster, who was known to many as Excelsior's town dog, had quite a daily routine for the last 13 years or so. Nearly each and every day, especially when it was not freezing cold outside and before his hind legs started to give out, the brown and white springer spaniel journeyed through downtown Excelsior, making a number of stops and visiting many people along the way.

His route wasn't completely haphazard, as Buster knew what he was looking for — his quest was affection from many people in town and, of course, food. Typical stops included Pizza Hut, Licks Unlimited ice cream shop, where Loran and Jan Lessard often gave him a treat, the restaurant at Haskell's, Franco Loris's Lakeshore Deli, where Buster feasted on large amounts of deli meats, and other spots, such as Noah's Ark pet store.

"We never bought him dog food," said Cindy Uran, whose family owned Buster since he was a puppy 13 years ago.

But one of his daily stops was the most eye-popping. When the hardware store was still open on the corner of Second and Water streets, Buster was a regular patron.

"He would stand on the automatic door opener, wait for the door to open and then walk right in," said Uran. "He knew right where the doggy bones were, so he'd walk through the store and go get one. Then, with the bone in his mouth, he'd walk toward the exit door, stand on the mat and wait for the door to open, and then leave. People who had never seen this before could not believe it."

In addition, during the summer months Buster loved to "fish" for hours along the shores of the Commons.

"He would spend nearly all

day at the beach, or at the main docks, thinking he was fishing," Cindy said. "But he'd pull out rocks instead of fish. He'd bring one of rocks up to the shore and set it down like he was displaying a prize fish."

Excelsior lost its town dog in recent weeks. Buster died in mid-January after becoming ill with diabetes and, possibly, liver disease.

"Everybody in town knew Buster," said Cindy. "He brought a smile to so many people's faces; he had a great personality. I've heard from lots of people who are sad to see him go."

Even though Buster became quite ill in his final weeks, it was another tragedy that most likely led to his death. In December, John Uran, 41, Cindy's husband and Buster's main companion, died in a work accident. Uran, a lifelong area resident who was known by many local folks, ran his own well-drilling business.

"Buster was a lot like John — he loved people and kids, was really easy-going, and loved doing things like fishing, going on the boat, and even snowmobiling," Cindy said. "John would take Buster for rides right on his snowmobile — that was something to see."

After John died, Buster spent many days searching for his owner and companion, Cindy said.

"I tried to make him feel better," Cindy said. "I gave him John's old shirts to lie on, tried to give him his favorite hot dogs, but nothing worked. Buster lost 10 pounds and just wasn't himself. His health had been getting a little bit worse before John died, but for Buster, life without John was unbearable."

Shortly after veterinarians had determined Buster's illnesses, Cindy and her children, Joe, 19, and Brittany, 15, decided that the best thing to do was to have their dog put to sleep.

"I was having to carry Buster



Buster, the 13-year-old springer spaniel owned by the Uran family, died in recent weeks. He was known as Excelsior's town dog, as he often walked through or hung out in the business district, the neighborhoods and the Commons. At right is Buster's main companion, John Uran, who died in December.



outside when he needed to go out because he couldn't do it himself," Cindy said.

On the day Buster was scheduled to be put to sleep, he made one last journey through town. After Cindy put him outside at about 5:30 a.m., Buster gave her one last look as she went back into the house. When she went to get him a short time later, he was gone. Family members and friends searched for Buster for a day and a half. They posted signs around town and asked people to be on the lookout. The next day

a business owner called Cindy and said he saw Buster walking down by the Citgo gas station. Family members, including John's parents, began searching in that part of town.

They found Buster's body that afternoon by a dumpster outside of Maynard's. "It looked like he just lied down, like he was settling in on the couch for a nap," Cindy said. "It was really sad. He went there to die."

A restless soul

Even though Buster was well

Buster to page 11



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Buster / Town's dog dies after 13 years of roaming From page 1

known by many folks in Excelsior, he gained even greater fame in the mid-1990s. That's when the StarTribune and Sun-Sailor newspapers published stories about him, and KARE-TV did a segment about him on the night-time news.

At that time, Buster was in his prime, roaming the streets of town each and every day -- and getting caught quite frequently by the local dogcatcher. In the KARE-TV story, John Uran was quoted as saying that he'd paid a total of about \$600 in fines to get Buster released on numerous occasions.

"We paid a lot more than \$600 in the long run," Cindy Uran said. "But after a while people started looking out for the

dogcatcher and helping Buster out. And, Buster started knowing what vehicle to look out for; he avoided the dogcatcher the best he could."

There was also one legendary story involving Buster, the dogcatcher and Franco Loris of Lakeshore Deli.

One day during the summer of 1994, the dogcatcher was in the midst of collaring Buster when Loris came up and set him free. The deli owner had to go court over the matter and ended up paying a fine and receiving a year of probation. In the StarTribune article, Loris was quoted as saying: "I liberated the dog."

"When we first got him we did our best to keep him in the

yard," Cindy recalled. "We tried an electric fence, but Buster would just go right through it. And he could get out of any regular fence. When we did tie him up on a leash, he was completely miserable and would whine and cry all day long. He was not the kind of dog you could keep tied up. So, we let him go. And while some people might not have liked it, lots of people loved seeing him."

"The funny thing is that even though he loved being out and about," Cindy added, "when people saw him later on at night they'd say, 'Time to go home now, Buster.' And he'd go."

It seems Buster knew when it was the right time to die, too.