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Fashion Modeling Goes to the Dogs

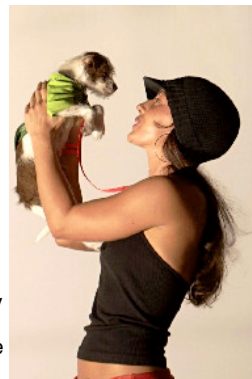
By Vladimir Negrón

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The photographers were all vying for a position to snap a shot of the top models for TORU's new spring line, Rescue Wear, last Friday night at Cabana One, located atop the Mayfair Hotel & Spa in Coconut Grove. The only difference: the models at the Rescues Rock the Runway fashion show did not need to shave their legs.

No, Adriana Lima and the rest of the Victoria's Secret Angels haven't lost their minds. The models were, in fact, four-legged canines from Paws 4 You Rescue, a non-profit animal rescue organization based in Miami, FL. Paws 4 You Rescue's top priority is to save dogs from being euthanized at Miami-Dade Animal Services, but it also works to rescue animals from various situations, including those that are sick, injured, homeless, surrendered, or simply lost.

"Miami-Dade Animal Services is our pound, our animal control," says Carol Caridad, president of Paws 4 You Rescue. "They have about 300 to 400 dogs there at any given time and unfortunately [given their limited capacity] they have to euthanize 100 to 150 animals every day, dogs or cats." Since the formation of Paws 4 You Rescue in 2007, Caridad and her team have adopted out nearly 600 dogs.



Rescues Rock the Runway wasn't just about adopting out the dogs that were there, though. "It was creating the awareness that there are such well-behaved animals that are rescued and you don't need to go to a store to buy a dog," explains Caridad. "I think that the perceived stereotypical dog is an out-of-control street dog, and that's just not true."

TORU, which designed the Rescue Wear line to help promote awareness for rescue groups, will donate 15 percent of the Rescue Wear proceeds to Paws 4 You Rescue. "Coming off of the success of our Good Dog Collection...we knew that we wanted to do something to help out Paws 4 You and promote awareness for the importance of rescue, adoption and *spay* and *neuter* programs," says Susan Levine, co-owner of TORU.

Levine partnered with Vanessa Rossman two years ago to form TORU, a dog apparel line with a rock 'n' roll edge. "Music was a huge part of our style...and we saw that a lot of dog clothes that were out there were kind of *tuffy*, so we decided to make a line that appealed to people like us, who grew up with rock and punk," says Levine. "It's like *Spinal Tap* for dogs."

After strutting his stuff up and down the catwalk (or would it be a dogwalk in this case?), one of the dog models, a Jack Russell Terrier mix named Pilot, was adopted by Meighan Swakon, a local resident. Pilot will be joining his new buddy Chopper, a West Highland Terrier, at the Swakon home. "My husband, Ryan, and I just try to do our fair share," says Swakon. "It's the least we can do for such lovable creatures."

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