

# The Progre

'Avoiding All Malice and Uncharitableness' Former U.S. President Grover Cleveland, Born in Caldwell, March 18, 1837

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## PILOTS TO THE RESCUE



Photo courtesy of Pilots to the Rescue

Singer and actor Constantine Maroulis, left, accompanies Michael Schneider, founder of Pilots to the Rescue, on a flight Jan. 19 to rescue 12 dogs from North Carolina. They landed at Essex County Airport in Fairfield.

# Charity helps save dogs who need stable homes

By **KATHY SHWIFF**  
EDITOR

**FAIRFIELD TWP.** — A few minutes after the small plane landed and pulled into its hangar at the Essex County Airport, Beth D'Alessandro and her daughter, Lena, 14, arrived to pick up the 12 dogs brought in from North Carolina.

They planned to deliver the animals to foster families lined up by A New Chance Animal Rescue in Westchester County, N.Y., who will care for them until they are adopted.

Ferrying the dogs on the first leg of their journey was Michael Schneider, founder of Pilots to the Rescue, which aims to help save

1,000 dogs in 2021.

Schneider, who lives in Brooklyn, said the nonprofit was on a waiting list for a year before it was able to rent the hangar, which protects the metal plane and its recent paint job and provides space to store the crates used to hold the dogs during flights.

Riding with Schneider on Tuesday, Jan. 19 was Constantine Maroulis, a singer and actor who has helped raise funds for Pilots to the Rescue.

Maroulis, who lives in Wyckoff, helped transfer the dogs from crates in the plane into crates in the D'Alessandro's SUV.

He had posed for a 2018 fundraising calendar for Pilots to the Res-

cue, then followed a recommendation to visit an animal shelter in Oakland, where he adopted a young pit bull mix named Clara, now nearly 5 years old.

"She's been just a wonderful addition to our family."

With some time on his hands during the coronavirus pandemic, he decided to take Schneider up on his offer to go on a rescue flight.

"It's just such a pleasure to be in a position to do things like this, to help out," he said. "Anything that they need, I'm always here to help, for sure."

"Hopefully to have these dogs bring some love and joy and

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# RESCUE: Charity helps dogs find homes

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stability to people's lives ... that's the thrill. I know what it's like to adopt a dog, and it changed my life."

Maroulis, a former contestant on the TV show "American Idol" who was nominated for a Tony Award for his role in "Rock of Ages" on Broadway, released a solo album, "Until I'm Wanted," during the summer.

He has been coaching young singers and doing some cameos during the pandemic. "I can't wait to get back to playing shows and being on stage again."

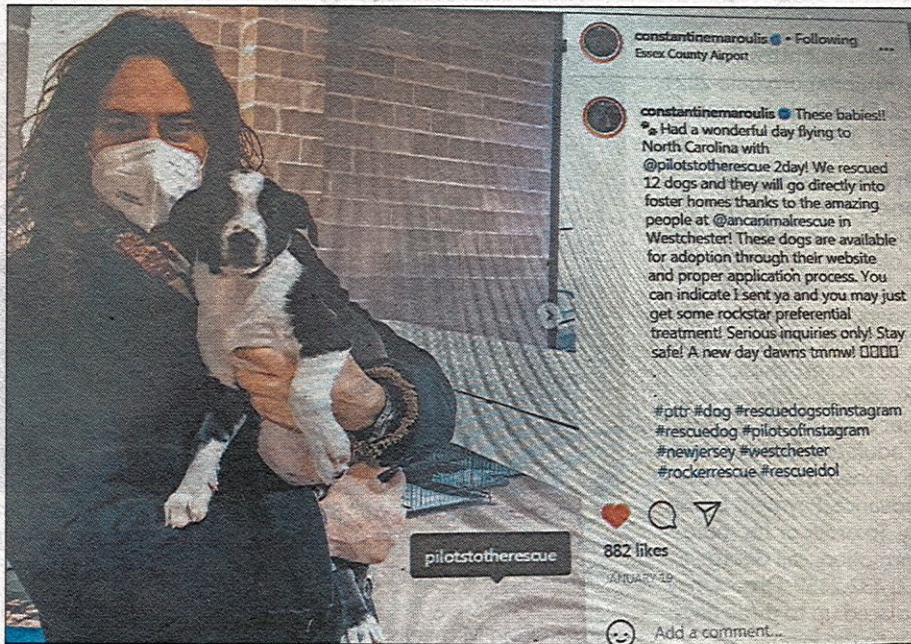
He hopes to open a professional preparatory program for students in Bergen County in the next couple years.

## Courting Influencers

Schneider said someone suggested he call Maroulis when he was putting together the fundraising calendar.

He has been soliciting the help of "influencers" in a variety of spheres to help increase awareness of Pilots to the Rescue, which he founded in 2015.

Schneider decided to become a pilot after doing four skydiving jumps during 10 years, then taking a "discovery flight."



Constantine Maroulis posts to Instagram about his flight with Pilots to the Rescue.

It took him two years to do the 100 hours of flying required for a pilot's license. It cost between \$15,000 and \$25,000 for plane rentals and instruction.

He started Pilots to the Rescue after doing some flights for a similar organization. It combines his love of aviation and of rescuing animals.

The organization has been "getting busier and busier," he said.

Schneider does four to six rescue flights a month, carrying an average of 10

dogs or 30 cats. His usual co-pilot is Daniel Baumel.

## A New Chance

A New Chance Animal Rescue has been working with Pilots to the Rescue for about two years to rescue dogs from overcrowded shelters in the South and find them new homes.

During the past eight months, they have done about two flights a month, said Sophia Silverman, the nonprofit's president and intake coordinator.

"They're great to work

with."

A New Chance Animal Rescue, which provides dogs to residents within 90 miles of Bedford Hills, N.Y., including much of northern New Jersey, handled about 220 pet adoptions in 2020.

Many of the animals come from the Carolinas, a 12-hour trip by car or a three-hour flight, which is "much easier on the dogs and much easier on the volunteers too 'cause it's also a lot of driving for our volunteers," Silverman said.

