



LIFE IN

OCTOBER 2018

Paradise Valley

A social magazine for the residents of Paradise Valley

Meet Your Neighbors **The Meeks Family**



Photography by Artistic Impressions by Mara
At The Phoenician Resort

The Meeks Family

meet your neighbors

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Many people come to Arizona to enjoy our beautiful state. But one Paradise Valley family came as a matter of survival.

Meet the Meeks family. Brian and Marika had no plans to relocate to Arizona, but after Marika was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer and they were looking for the very best treatment options, they found an answer in Arizona, which became a temporary place to call home.

Even though the couple owned and operated several restaurants in Fort Wayne, IN, their brush with death taught them just how short life really is, and when they fell in love with Arizona during Marika's treatment, they dropped everything, sold the restaurants and picked up and moved.

Carly (22) and Caitie (19), the couple's daughters, also decided that Arizona was the place they wanted to call home and currently attend Arizona State University.

The family had suffered through the trauma of a cancer diagnosis and even though it seemed Marika, against the odds, was going to survive, cancer had left an indelible mark on the family.

When a new family member entered the Meeks' home, things suddenly changed, only this time it was for the better. The family adopted Stella, a young Pitbull-mix pup who had been dumped in a field with her sister. The day that Stella came home, the family, who had been broken and filled with fear and anxiety, started to heal. Stella gave the family, and in particular Marika, a new, positive, tail-wagging, happy focus.

Since that day, Stella has gone on to become a social media darling (@Incredibullstella) and a local celebrity. With tens of thousands of followers, many TV appearances and over 25 million video views, Marika and Stella work hard to help as many other people and animals as possible.

Leveraging their large audience, the pair work with national companies, such as Halo Pet Food, to get food, toys and supplies donated to help local animal shelters. Stella is a dog influencer and Marika is an influencer for lifestyle brands for companies such as CoolSculpting®, and Ring®, in addition to inspiring speaking engagements at conferences and corporate events.

Marika and Stella work full-time advocating for dogs in need, raising funds to underwrite spay and neuter initiatives, and sharing their story about the power of pet ownership and educating people about how having a pet has been scientifically proven to help you live a happier, healthier, longer life.

With a coloring book available on Amazon, a 2019 calendar, a gig as a spokesdog for national brands, and a memoir coming out next fall — IncrediBull Stella: How the Love of a Pit Bull Rescued a Family, Kensington, October 2019 — Stella is a busy girl.

Stella has also been instrumental in helping her family foster and rehab many other homeless dogs and through her patience and guidance, help them become the best pets they can be for their fur-ever families.

Keep an eye out for Marika and Stella; you'll see them partnered



with Hop Doddy Burger Bar and the #LovePup Foundation. Join them in November when Hop Doddy Burger Bar adds a new burger to the menu: The IncrediBull Burger. Stella is the center of the campaign and each IncrediBull Burger sold means a donation to the #LovePup Foundation, a prominent rescue operated by Johnjay Van Es from Johnjay and Rich in the Morning and his wife, Blake Van Es.

And if you are a fan of HGTV, be sure to watch for the family, Stella included, on a Christmas special airing in December. Additionally, Stella and Marika are pitching their own reality TV show called "Stella's Rescue Rehab" (www.stellasrescueremodel.com) to major networks.

The Meeks family, loving life once again in beautiful Paradise Valley, is determined to pay forward the gift of Stella, and Marika, in particular, is determined to make the most out of her second chance at life.

For more information, please visit Marika and Stella at www.incredibullstella.com



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MEET ELLIE



Here's a dog with a story that's worth telling. Meet Ellie, a black-and-white beauty who has had a tough life, a life that almost ended until she got a second chance.

Ellie was picked up as a stray in downtown Phoenix and spent several months at Maricopa Animal Care and Control. Ellie wasn't aggressive, or sick, but she ended up on the euthanasia list because she was simply too afraid to be adopted.

Shut down and terrified, Ellie was doing poorly at the shelter. Distraught at the sad ending that Ellie was soon facing, a shelter volunteer approached Paradise Valley residents (and experienced foster dog parents) Brian and Marika Meeks and asked if they could help.

Ellie was the worst case that the Meekses had ever seen, and they were doubtful that they could help her. She hid in the corner and seemed especially fearful of men. But Stella, the Meekses' dog, did what humans could not do and quickly took Ellie under her wing and, for the first time, Ellie found a support system and a positive relationship.

Slowly, unbelievably, Ellie started to improve. She gave little signs that there might be hope after all. A tail wag, or a tentative lick, Ellie was showing that underneath this terrified exterior was a dog that just wanted to feel safe and loved.

Through Stella's social media accounts, Ellie became a celebrity herself and people around the world started rooting for Ellie, the

ultimate underdog, to find happiness. Ellie's story was then picked up by Animal Planet and has gone on to inspire over a million people.

Although still fearful, Ellie has made tremendous progress, and the Meekses are giving her more time to rehabilitate while they look for a fur-ever family to adopt her.

For more information about Ellie, please contact the Meekses at www.incredibullstella.com

pet of the month

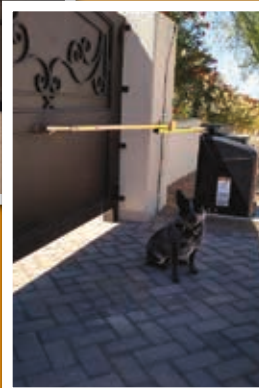
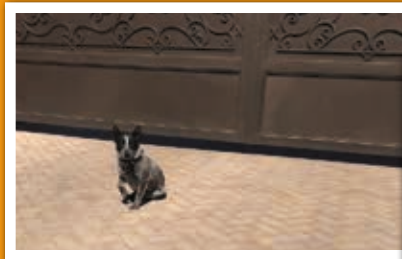
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