



This 'Disney On Ice' Real-Life Couple Is Living Their Favorite Fairy Tale

BY [LILLI PETERSEN](#) | OCT 8 2018 | [f](#)

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When you declare your college major, there's no box you can check to become a professional cat cuddler, ice cream taste tester, or cat video maker. Heck, you probably



in some of the most ridiculous, unbelievable, and totally envy-inducing fields you never thought possible. These are #careergoals, for real.



Let's be honest — there was a time when you were a kid when all you wanted to be when you grew up was Ariel, and/or an ice princess (second choice). Well, I'm happy to tell you that dream is, in fact, a possibility. Which one? Well, both. Meet Alex Goncharuk, 25 — otherwise known as Ariel from Disney's *The Little Mermaid* in the latest *Disney On Ice* production, *Mickey's Search Party*.

This is one mermaid, though, who doesn't do a lot of swimming. In fact, Goncharuk spends most of her time either swirling across the ice or swirling through the air in the arms of her very own prince. And when I say, "her very own," I mean that literally. The Eric to Goncharuk's Ariel is actually her own real-life husband, Artem Kazakov, 27. Together, the pair acts out a fairy-tale romance in their real lives in front of an admiring crowd. "For us, playing any roles, [is about us] showing the love, and feeling the love. It's always about us," Goncharuk tells me in an interview for Elite Daily.

"For us it's our main goal," Kazakov adds. "We really want to show the audience what we have inside of us, what feelings we have between us."



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It's good that they feel so close to the characters, because they spend a lot of time playing them. The couple, who has been married for two years, works touring the country with *Disney on Ice* to bring their IRL fairy tale to excited kids around the U.S. And while the show itself clocks in at just under two hours, that doesn't mean it's not intense.



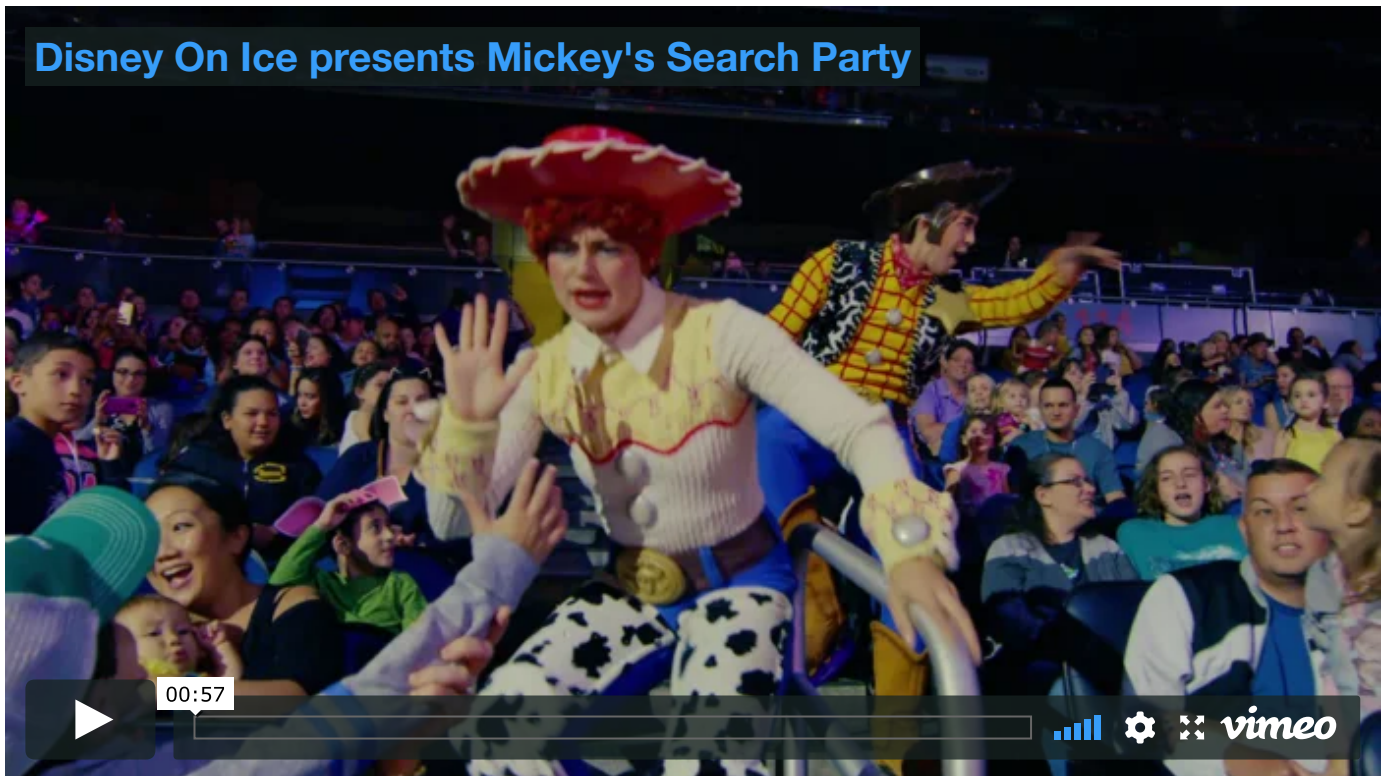
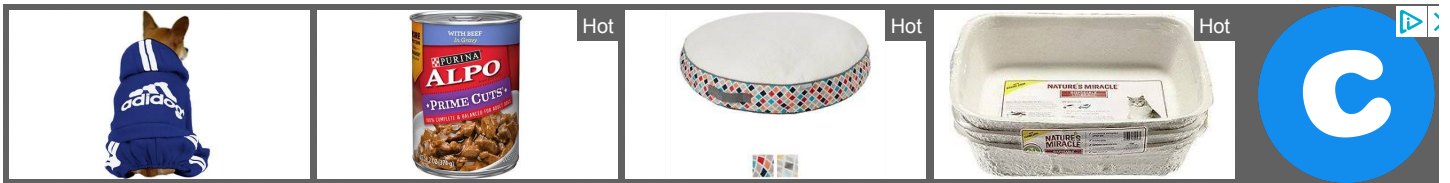
THERE'S SO MUCH TRUST IN EACH OTHER.

The couple's skate to "Kiss The Girl" is the final number of the show before the closing song, meaning there's a lot of pressure for a showstopper. And they deliver. In fact, the pair spends a solid chunk of their performance time not on the rink but in the air above it,



from Kazakov's embrace into a graceful backbend while balancing on the tops of his feet, all while spinning through the air 28 feet above the ice.

"There's so much trust in each other," Goncharuk tells me. "If we tried something new I would always trust him. If I'm thinking something's going to go wrong, or I'm going to fall or anything ... he's going to hold me as tight as possible. It's perfect."



So, what's it like to play Disney characters for a living? For Goncharuk and Kazakov, most of their day is rehearsal, and that's a good thing considering the kind of stunts they have to do. They start their day at noon and go through the choreography and the stunts, particularly the aerial straps.





Though the two have both been skating since they were children, they say the straps were difficult to learn because they require a whole new type of strength. In fact, it took 10 weeks to nail down how to use them. "It was really hard," she says, "because [as a skater] you've never been using your upper body as much as right now." The two had to add in extra upper-body workouts to their routine to get the muscle needed to pull off the acrobatics. Even on their days off, they hit the gym to maintain their strength.

But it's all worth it at showtime, when the lights go down at about 7:00 p.m. "For me personally, having the kids smiling at you every time when you go on the ice ... anytime when you see the happy face of the kid or the parent or anyone that's in front of you, that's my goal," Goncharuk says.



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While she loves seeing the happy faces day after day, that doesn't mean the job can't still be wearing. Because *Mickey's Search Party* is a traveling show, days not spent performing



days of shows and then be on the move again. The cast has to keep their things well-packed, knowing that every Sunday they'll be picking up and leaving. "It's just hard," she says. "Some people think you just travel a lot, seeing the world. Yes, this is a part of our job as well, but sometimes it's complicated."

But it also makes the cast very tight-knit, since they're together all the time. "We really love each other," Goncharuk says. She notes that many people in the cast come from different countries. Goncharuk and Kazakov themselves are both from Moscow, and have been in the United States since 2014. "We're a kind of family as well," she says of the cast. "My family is really far away right now and all I have is my husband here."



NOW WE'RE HAPPILY MARRIED EVER AFTER.

Though Goncharuk is the more talkative of the pair, when I ask how they got together, it's Kazakov who wants to tell me the story. He says the two met when they started to pair skate together, and he knew quickly that she could be *the one*. He explains, "We met each other, we looked at each other from a distance, then we start to skate together, then we start[ed] to feel for each other."



Hot



"Except I was talking a lot," Goncharuk interjects jokingly. "Not like Ariel."

They say despite the pressures, performing together has only made their relationship stronger. "I was thinking about it, how it's going to affect our relationship," Kazakov muses. But he says it's worked out great. "For us, it's really worked well. And now we're happily married ever after."

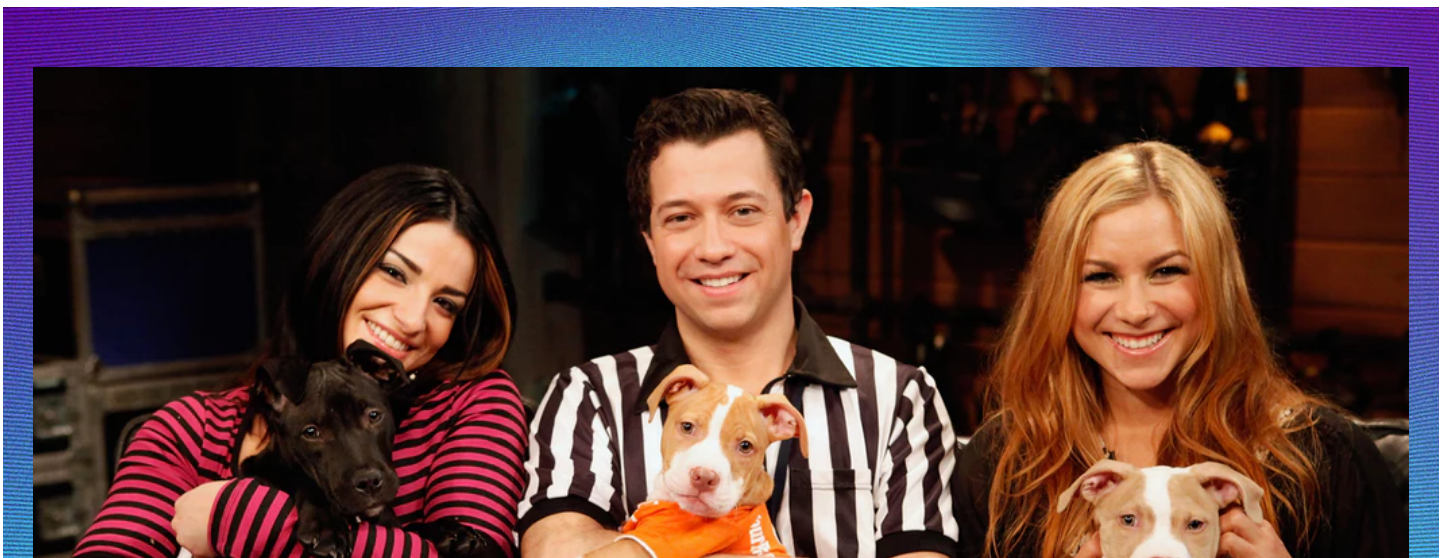


witches in real life. "Just keep moving all the time. Don't stop, and never give up," she advises. "All the power you have, if you're giving it to this, all that dream, it's just going to happen."

And for all the similarities between the real-life couple and the Disney one, there's one that Goncharuk clearly thinks is the best. "It's not just me, it's not just Ariel," she says. "She finally got her prince. She's got to kiss him — and I'm kissing him, and this is my favorite part."

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Caroline Wurtzel/Elite Daily





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Puppy Bowl Referee Dan Schachner Has The Doggo-Lovin' Job Of Your Dreams

BY [LIZZY ROSENBERG](#) | 4 DAYS AGO |

When you declare your college major, there's no box you can check to become a professional cat cuddler, ice cream taste tester, or cat video maker. Heck, you probably never even believed those kinds of careers could exist – but they do. In Elite Daily's new series, [I Have The Job You Want](#), we're bringing you all the details on what it's like to work in some of the most ridiculous, unbelievable, and totally envy-inducing fields you never thought possible. These are #careergoals, for real.

Back in pre-K, I told my teacher I wanted to grow up to be a puppy. And while that makes absolutely no sense at all, since then, I've had my eye on one job. If you've ever watched Animal Planet's Puppy Bowl, which airs right before the Super Bowl, you may have noticed



If you've never had the chance to watch Animal Planet's Puppy Bowl, it's a ridiculously cute competition that precedes one of the biggest televised events of the year, the Super Bowl. Two teams of puppies, Team Ruff and Team Fluff, fight (er, tumble around with chew toys) in order to win the Lombarky Trophy. But while the puppies "compete," one man is in charge of keeping the play fun, the game fair, and the treats coming: Dan Schachner, who has run the game as the official referee since Puppy Bowl VIII in 2012. I had the opportunity to speak with him in person, and for real, I couldn't help but squee over it all.

Dan Schachner grew up with dogs (dachshunds specifically), but never in his wildest dreams did he imagine that he would end up hosting Animal Planet's highly-renowned Puppy Bowl. He had been working as a TV host (and had even hosted a few Animal Planet shows) but eventually, the original Puppy Bowl host ended up leaving after only seven years to join another TV network. Schachner jumped at the opening. Securing the job, however, definitely was not an easy task.



According to Schachner, he started out just watching the Puppy Bowl, like everyone else in this puppy-lovin' world, so the mere prospect of being considered for the role was a total dream to him. He had to go through rigorous interviews and submit an audition tape to be considered.

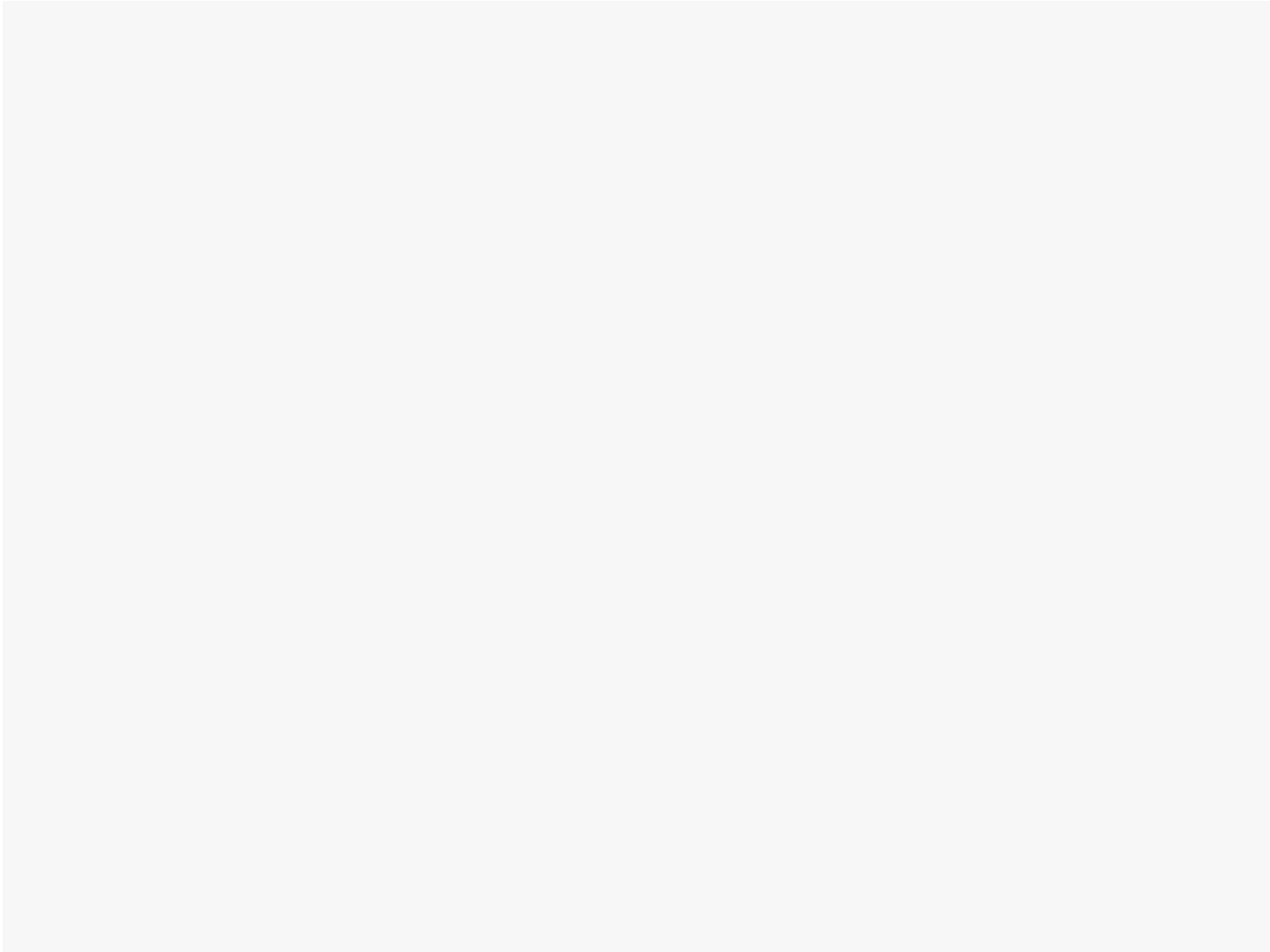
"[When the opportunity opened], I did an audition tape plus an interview, and, I don't know, they had some concerns... that I looked too young at first, or that I wasn't experienced and all that." He said. But persistence and a knack for playing with puppies paid off. "Eventually, I won them over, and eight years later, its still my job."



The job itself actually goes far beyond officiating the world's cutest game. Preparation starts early on in the summer, around May or June, and it's Schachner's job to coordinate the canine lineup. About six months prior to the main event, he gets to file through thousands of photos sent from several rescues nationwide to find his best contestants. The photos are actually of the potential puppies' parents (since the litters aren't born yet), but they figure the pups will be born late in the summer, which means they will be able to participate in October when filming commences. The dogs must all **meet certain requirements**, including having all their vaccinations and meeting height and weight limits for the play-stadium.



rescues from across the nation reach out to them promoting their own dogs. The shelters continue sending updates until the final decisions for the official lineup are made in September. Then, until the Puppy Bowl airs, Schachner spends his time promoting it, handling press, and marketing.



Lizzy Rosenberg

It's extremely rewarding, and not just for time spent with puppies. Possibly the best thing about Puppy Bowl is that each and every one of these rescue puppies gets adopted in the end.





Schachner says that even though the actual Puppy Bowl doggos get adopted before the show even airs, the effects are further-reaching, as the cute overload drives more people to shelters and ultimately gets more dogs adopted. "Every year, the shelters report back to us that they have a huge uptake in people looking to adopt," he says. According to Vox, on the off-chance a puppy *is* still up for adoption, they're usually snagged within five minutes of airing. But, they end up [connecting you to other litters from the same shelter](#). There's a puppy for everyone.



I was thrilled to hear the Puppy Bowl has a 100 percent adoption rate every single year, without fail. While Schachner says achieving that was originally a challenge, the goals of the event have broadened with its success. "It's about, 'How many more can we get adopted beyond the initial 96 [puppies in the lineup]?' " Schachner says.



WE NEVER THOUGHT A DOG COULD ACTUALLY KICK A GOAL, BUT
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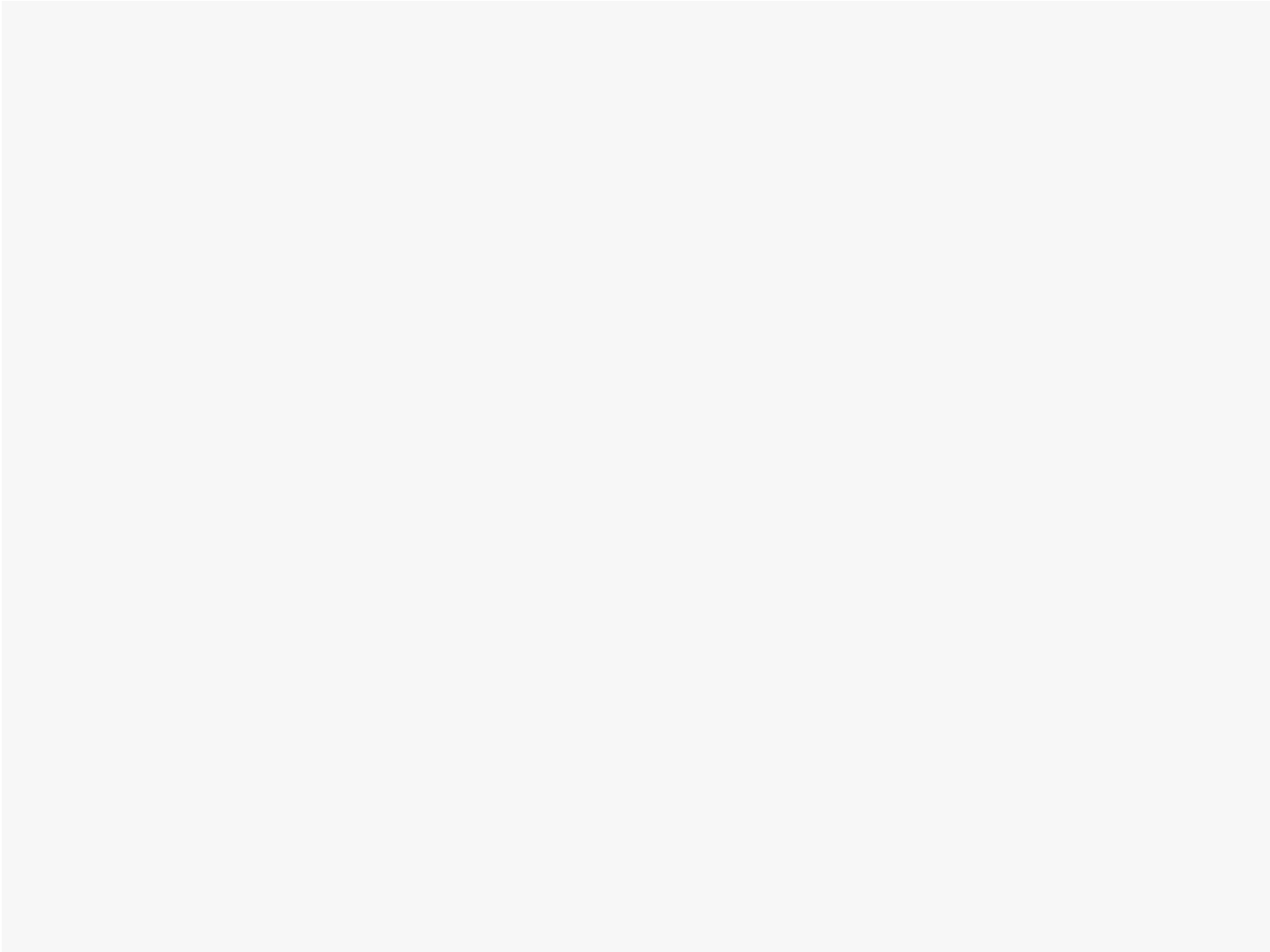
Aside from the organizational aspect, though, hanging out with puppies all day long is (obviously) incredibly valuable in itself. And, most importantly, it makes for some absolutely hilarious stories.

"Some memorable moments from my Puppy Bowl career include double touchdowns and dogs ripping my sock off." Schachner says. "Oh, and [the first puppy field goal](#) happened in Puppy Bowl X. We never thought a dog could actually kick a goal, but it happened."

Since its humble beginnings, the Puppy Bowl itself has grown tremendously. In recent years, it's introduced a [kitten halftime show in 2006](#), [baby chick cheerleaders in 2016](#), and even [the Dog Bowl in 2018](#), which highlights adult dogs. According to Schachner, dogs need more help getting adopted than puppies do. Sometimes, they stay in shelters for twice as long as puppies, and they're often the first to be euthanized.



adult dogs – that also in some cases – need more of our help than puppies." Schachner says. "The fact that the network green-lit a Dog Bowl was a blast. Then, to hear the Dog Bowl was coming back – meaning the network wanted to keep airing it – was a double win."



Lizzy Rosenberg

Schachner seems to have pretty big aspirations for the Puppy Bowl franchise. Next, he's looking at the golden oldies, with aspirations to create a senior Dog Bowl. Which – honestly – I am so down for.



constantly up for adoption, and giving them the chance to spend the rest of their lives in a loving home is vital. While he knows health issues can be a sticking point, he's confident that people will know the value of these elderly lovebugs. "Who knows, maybe they're in wheelchairs," he says. "I'm not trying to exploit any dog weaknesses for TV value, it's just letting people know that dogs that have disabilities or special needs, or they are just up there in age, and they can still make great additions to any household."



His love for animals doesn't end when the cameras shut down, either. Having this job for almost a decade has inspired Schachner to foster dogs on a regular basis, giving them somewhere to stay prior to finding their fur-ever home.

"I think when I started this job, I thought, 'Well, it's only a matter of time before I finally adopt.' And then, the more I got into it, I realized, 'I don't wanna just adopt one, I just want to foster,'" he says. "So, here we are, eight years later, still fostering. And — I don't know — they say Santa Claus is not anyone's 'dad,' he's like *the* 'dad' to all the kids in the world. And I know it's corny, but that's kind of what I'm going for." Clearly Schachner brings joy to a lot of pups, not to mention people, in this world. It's not a bad goal to aim for.