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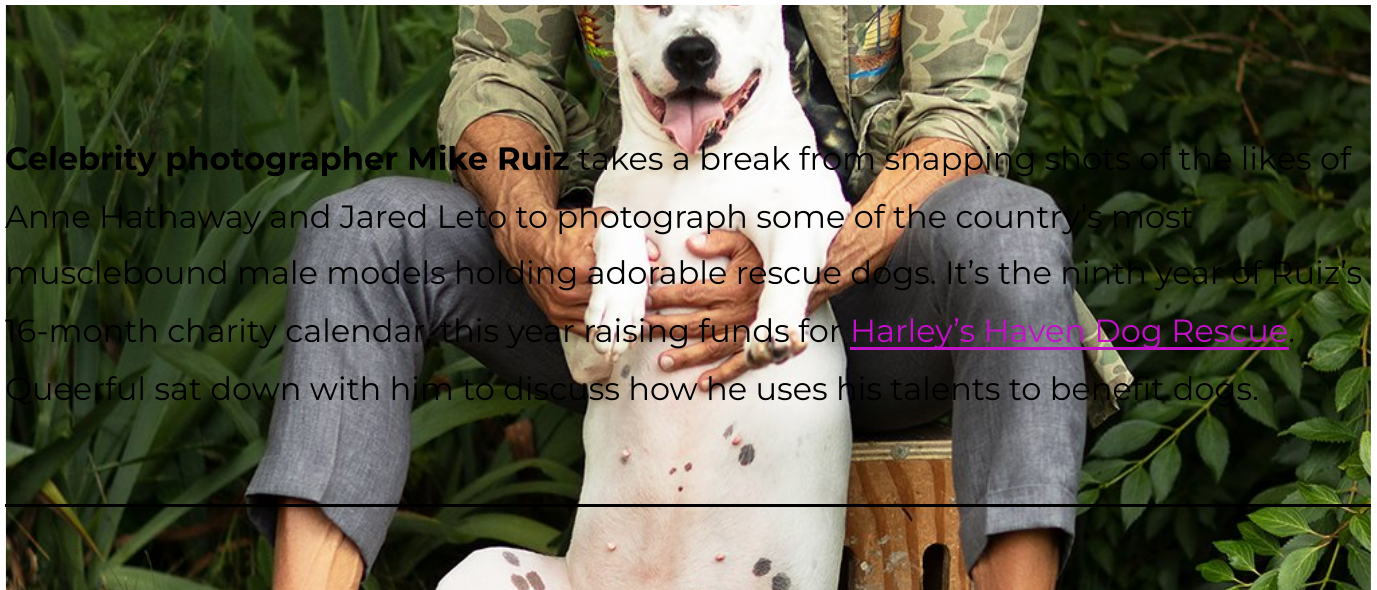
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Muscled Models Grab Mutts for Mike Ruiz's Charity Calendar





Celebrity photographer Mike Ruiz takes a break from snapping shots of the likes of Anne Hathaway and Jared Leto to photograph some of the country's most musclebound male models holding adorable rescue dogs. It's the ninth year of Ruiz's 16-month charity calendar, this year raising funds for [Harley's Haven Dog Rescue](#). **Queerful** sat down with him to discuss how he uses his talents to benefit dogs.

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Winnie McCroy: We're here with celebrity photographer Mike Ruiz to discuss his 2023 calendar, *Mutts and Muscles*, to raise funds for Harley's Haven Dog Rescue. This 16-month calendar features precious pups held by some of the country's biggest male fitness models, which is a winning combination. Tell folks a little bit about this.

Mike Ruiz: This calendar was born out of my love for a sweet little pit bull named Oliver that I adopted in 2012. I wanted to care for him well so I started doing research on how to care specifically for pit bull type dogs. And I found so much information and misinformation online about how they're maligned and misrepresented. The

media sensationalizes every little incident and they become like the scourge of the dog world, which couldn't be further from the truth. They're inherently the sweetest dogs. As a matter of fact, they're very low on the aggression scale. There's like 50 other breeds including labs and even golden retrievers and Cocker Spaniels that are more aggressive. I wanted to do something to help this maligned breed by educating people. As a result of them being overbred by backyard breeders and irresponsible breeders, like 90% of the dogs in all shelters in the U.S. are our pit bull type dogs.

Winnie McCroy: Wow, I had no idea it was that high.

Mike Ruiz: It's a disproportionately abused, neglected, and discarded breed. And of course, they use them for fighting. And I mean, everything about this poor breed is just heartbreaking. So I felt like I needed to do something to help them and I decided to make this calendar. You know, a bunch of hot guys with their shirts off and cute little puppies to me, was—I would buy that calendar.



Mike Ruiz's

**mutts &
muscles**



2023 Calendar

Winnie McCroy: Absolutely. I remember all the cuddly pictures of your pittie and I still remember when you lost him in the Fall of 2018. That was a really hard blow and it's nice to see that you've continued with this calendar year after year. Is this the 10th year?

Mike Ruiz: This is the ninth year; next year is going to be the 10th Anniversary of this. Gosh! I can't believe it's been 10 years. Oh, by the way, since I have you, let me show you my new little girl, Julia.

Winnie McCroy: What a beautiful dog.

Mike Ruiz: She's a little dog reactive, hence I can't have more than her in the house. Otherwise, I'd be a dog hoarder because I would want to adopt every dog that I see.

Winnie McCroy: I hear that! And I know that you actually donate your time to more than just this dog or this calendar. You did a calendar for *Stand Up For Pits* and that's really nice. I know that you help youth charities. I remember back in 2019, you did a birthday fundraiser to raise money for the Ali Forney Project and help the gay youths. Why is it so important that you donate your time and considerable talent to these projects?

Mike Ruiz: That comes from my unhealthy amount of empathy—or, you know, in this case a healthy amount of empathy—for the underdog. You know, having been through the whole gay teen bullying experience, I mean I'm not gonna go into detail, but I was an underdog for a long, long time. And so it was almost kind of like a deal I was making with the powers that be, that if I was ever in a position to do anything to help anybody, I will. And I guess they were listening.

Winnie McCroy: I think that you really don't mind to get into any positions to help, because I have seen dogs literally on your lap eating out of your hand while you are on your Instagram feed live, trying to get them adopted. You are really putting your money where your mouth is.

Mike Ruiz: Yeah, I feel like I have to. I mean, I'm just compelled to because of my empathy. I can't not do anything; the pain of not doing anything supersedes the

discomfort of going into a shelter and seeing all these dogs that have been discarded and the heartbreak of them looking at you with their big, sad eyes. I sometimes feel like I'm not even making a dent in the problem. But nonetheless, I feel like I have to do something about it so that I can go to my grave knowing that at least I tried.



Winnie McCroy: What do you suggest other people who feel like you do?

Mike Ruiz: I encourage everybody out there to help. People say, 'Oh, well, I'm not a famous, I'm not a celebrity, there's nothing I can do.' Well, 100% percent of the dogs that we get adopted are because we share them on social media and oftentimes, they're shared by some random person, not a celebrity. Like I'll post something, and somebody else will repost it and somebody in like Mississippi or something will see it. And they'll adopt the dog, you know? Like that's 100% of how these dogs get adopted. So, just sharing a dog on Instagram, sharing one dog, one a day, or a week, or a month will invariably help save that dog's life. I encourage everyone to share these stories and these dogs on Instagram.

Winnie McCroy: Absolutely. And I always love the way that you find this intersectional place for your love of dogs and your love of our LGBTQ+ community; you're always giving back to both with the projects that you do. It made me want to reach out to you because most of the time when we saw each other it would be in

Fire Island, which is a place that was made for our community. And I feel like with Queerful, we're trying to create an online place for our community, so it felt like a natural fit to call you. And I want it to be a boon. So tell people as we part where they can get this calendar.



Mike Ruiz: It's \$26.99 and 100% of the proceeds go to charity. Everyone donated their time. Everybody! I obviously shoot it for free. All the models fly in on their own dime, so nobody's getting paid on this. A hundred percent of the money goes to the organization that are were benefiting this year and it's [Harley's Haven Dog Rescue](#), so they can go to that site, or to the link in [my Instagram bio](#), which is at Mike Ruiz One.

Winnie McCroy: And do you think it'll make a good Hanukkah gift?

Mike Ruiz: Oh yeah. I mean, it's like a no-brainer. Everyone loves these, they're benefiting a great cause, they're great as stocking stuffers. They're great gifts to, you

know, buy 10 or 20 of them for your friends and family. Everyone loves these calendars and everyone loves the meaning behind them and the function of them, which is to help these poor, abused, neglected, and abandoned dogs.

Winnie McCroy: I hear that. I'm really feeling the puppy love myself. Thank you so much for taking time out of your schedule to talk with us today. And I wish you the best on the sale of this calendar to give all this money back to save more dogs as I know that's a cause that's really close to your heart.

Mutts and Muscles 2023 calendars are available for \$26.99 plus shipping and tax at <https://www.harleyshavendogrescue.com/product-page/mike-ruiz-s-mutts-and-muscles-2023-calendar> or via Ruiz' Instagram page at <https://www.instagram.com/mikeruizone/?hl=en>



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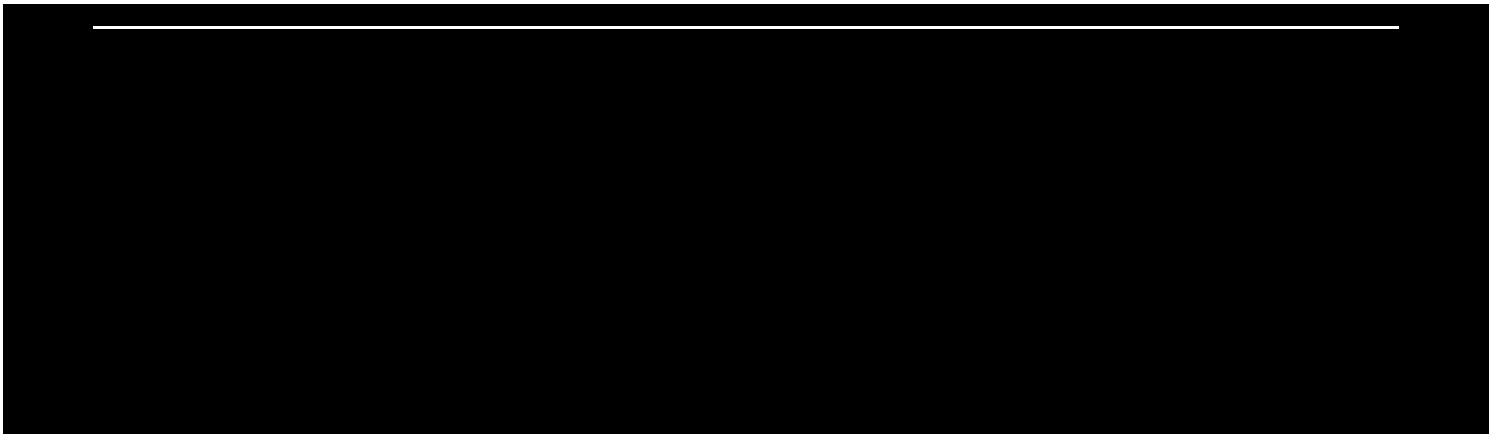


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