

Man's best friend trained as guiding light for blind

EDITOR'S NOTE: Members of the Georgetown Lions service club travelled to Oakville Dec. 29 to view the facilities of the Canine Vision School. The Lions have a special interest in the dog-training school for the blind because they are enthusiastic sponsors of the program. The following is a report about the school by Herald reporter Cheryl Moeder.

Where once the squeals of children's laughter echoed down the halls, now the deep-throated barks of dogs fill the air at 152 Wilson Ave. The red-bricked building in Oakville, once a public school, now houses Canine Vision Canada, a school to train guide dogs and their masters.

Sponsored by the Lions Foundation of Canada, Canine Vision Canada opened its doors for service Nov. 9, 1985. It was the first project of the foundation formed in 1983 by Lions clubs all across Canada.

The approximately two years it takes to train a guide dog for duty begins within weeks of a puppy's birth.

Most of the puppies are donated by breeders across Canada, said Communication and Promotions Officer Jennifer King. As well, the school has a breeding program in its infant stages.



Jennifer King

German shepherds, golden retrievers and yellow, chocolate and black labradors make for the best guide dogs. They have a good shoulder height of 22 to 24 inches, are intelligent breeds overall and make good working dogs, Ms. King said. As well, their short hair requires limited grooming and care.

Puppies come into the school at eight to 10 weeks of age and are placed in a Foster Puppy Program. A family takes the puppy into its home until it reaches 12 to 14 months.

The family teaches the puppy good house manners such as not to chew the leg of a chair, Ms. King said, although some go as far as training the dogs to sit and lie down. "It helps them (the puppy) learn how to live in a home environment," Ms. King said. Dogs raised in kennels would not know what a chesterfield is and are not as personal.

The Canine Vision Canada provides food for the puppy as well as pays veterinary bills such as its shots and inoculations.

Once the puppy reaches maturity, which can range from 12 to 18 months depending on the dog, it comes back to the school for assessment. Each trainer takes the dog and forms an opinion as to its temperament and stability. The dog needs to hit a balance



CHECKERED WALK-Wade Beattie, one of the guide dog trainers at Canine Vision Canada, completes his rounds with Checkers, a Rhode-

slan Ridgeback. The dogs are harnessed and taken for walks a minimum of an hour a day.



SPECIAL TREATMENT-Dudley, a golden retriever, lays back and enjoys a grooming by apprentice Ken

Thompson. The dogs are bathed and brushed in a special room at the school set aside for this purpose.

between being passive enough to obey its master and aggressive enough to take its own initiative when faced with odd things such as escalators or potential accident situations, Ms. King said.

As well, the physical condition of the dog is checked. These breeds are prone to problems such as hip displacement where the hip joint of the dog does not fit properly.

At this stage approximately 50 per cent of the dogs pass assessment and carry on while the other 50 per cent who fail are found good homes, Ms. King said. A dog may be rejected from the program at any time.

The school employs three fully qualified trainers and three apprentice trainers who put the dogs through their paces and keep them groomed.

Dogs are trained on a one dog to one trainer basis five days a week for a minimum of an hour a day. Depending on how quickly the animal learns, this period may last from three to five months, Ms. King said.

Right now the school boards 23 dogs but has the capacity to keep 44. Besides basic obedience commands such as sit, down and stay, the dogs are taught forward, right and left, Ms. King said. When trotting down the sidewalk a guide dog is trained to centre itself and walk in a straight line. It is also taught to walk from curb to curb and then to stop.

Dogs are also taught to find. With this basic command they can root out anything from door handles and stairs to bedroom slippers. Dogs learn to respond to verbal and both verbal and hand commands, Ms. King said.

One thing dogs cannot do is read traffic lights. "The blind person is responsible for where they are," Ms. King said. At an intersection the blind person listens to traffic noise to determine when it is safe to cross. A guide dog will only disobey a command in order to prevent an accident.

After their three month training the dogs are matched to students rather than the other way around. "We train the dog and figure out who is going to be best for that dog," Ms. King said. For example, a younger man would suit a livelier dog while a quieter dog would be best for an older person.

Approximately 120 students averaging between 20 to 45 years of age from all across Canada - save for British Columbia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick - have graduated from the Oakville school.

"Once the students and dogs are matched they never leave each other," Ms. King said. The dogs sleep with their companions and sit with them in the dining room. They are together 24 hours a day.

An intensive 28-day training period for both the student and dog follows. When the students first come they take a series of lectures dealing on the care of the dog.

Dog and companion do a lot of walking, starting off in the residential area surrounding the school grounds, gradually moving into downtown Oakville and finishing off their training spending a few

days wandering the streets of Toronto.

After graduation the school follows up on the team to make sure everything is okay, Ms. King said.

The cost of \$5,000 required to graduate a dog/student team is funded by service clubs such as the Lions Club, corporations and individuals.

Many sponsors such as Ralston Purina, one of the school's biggest contributors, will name a dog after their business and provide a foster family for the puppy. For example the dog food company names all the dogs they sponsor Checkers, Ms. King said. That way the contributors can watch their project grow.

The month-long stay at the school is free for the students. Canine Vision Canada pays for their room and board and transportation to and from the school, Ms. King said.

As well, the school provides them with a trained guide dog and necessary equipment. Once graduated though, the student picks up the dog's expenses.



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Women's shelter staff creates holiday spirit

By JULIE HOLMES Herald Special

Halton Women's Place isn't the most intimate place to spend Christmas if you are a mother with young children.

The shelter for abused women was home to a number of families over the Christmas period, but the hostel was not as filled as in other times.

Staff and volunteers did the best during the holidays to welcome those in need at the shelter. Gifts of food and toys were offered to mothers and their children.

Even an old-fashioned Christmas dinner was enjoyed by the residents.

Halton Women's Place is an emergency hostel for abused women and their children which serves the Halton area. It is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and has a hotline for women who need assistance.

Halton Women's Place opened in October of 1980, and has helped 1106 families. Last year, the hostel sheltered 128 women and 156 children. Joan Turnbull, the Director of Halton Women's Place, said that the hostel "wasn't quite as busy this Christmas as the one before," which isn't that unusual because "most women hang on during Christmas for the kids' sakes."

Families are allowed to stay at the shelter for six weeks where they can

"think things through, and get counselling," she explained.

The hostel also assists families after they have left the shelter. "We try to find ways for getting them set up and help them start their lives over," said Joan Turnbull.

Ex-residents on social assistance received hampers of food and toys for the holidays to make things a little easier.

"Our donations have never been better," said the director. "It's great!" A total of 70 cartons of food were distributed, and each family received about four. Volunteers and other staff members at the hostel also provided each family member with a bag full of clothes, toys, and other necessities.

The staff and volunteers at Halton's Women's Place also wrapped gifts for each resident and her children. "We really appreciated the donations, people sent in a lot of non-perishable foods which helped us with our budget and with funds," Ms. Turnbull explained.

The shelter planned an old-fashioned Christmas, with the women and children relaxing and enjoying a special Christmas dinner.

Joan Turnbull filled the position of director in November of 1985. "I've been here for six years now," she said. "I'm committed to it."

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