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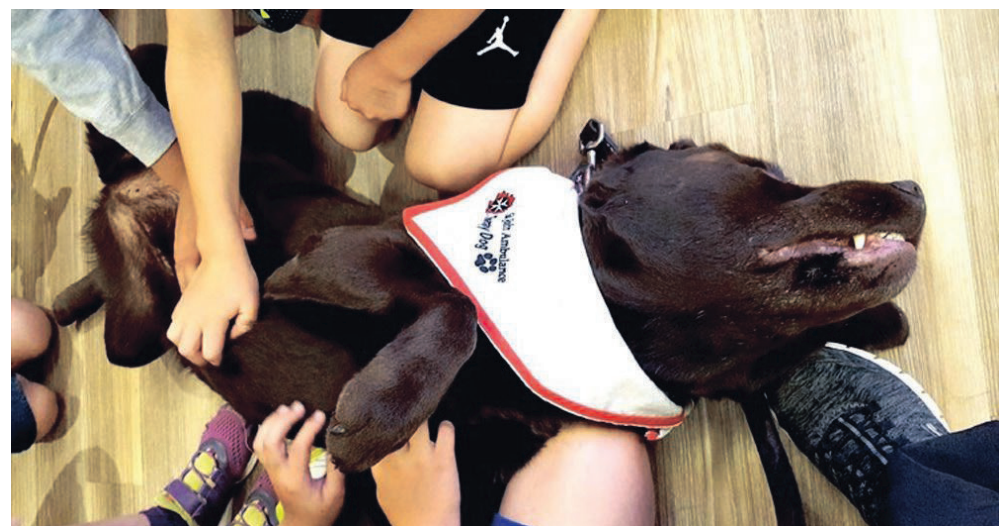
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BACK TO SCHOOL



Christine Lacombe

Libby the chocolate lab is a St. John's ambulance therapy dog that visits schools throughout the year to help children cope with daily stress.

Meet the therapy dogs helping kids cope with the stress of going back to school

ALEXANDRA HECK
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Maybe it's the way her tail thumps against objects when she wags it, or her cold wet nose, or maybe the eyes that just beg to keep petting.

Whatever it may be, children are enamoured with Libby, the 10-year-old chocolate lab when she walks into a school.

As a St. John Ambulance therapy dog, Libby visits Catholic schools in Georgetown alongside a group of volunteers on a weekly basis or more, to help students cope with the stresses that come with school.

"In a school you have this high energy," said Christine Lacombe, owner of Libby and an additional guide dog, 14-year-old Maverick.

She says she takes Maverick, who is quiet and geriatric to long term care homes to interact on a softer level with residents.

When Libby goes to school, it's all

wiggles and belly rubs.

"In the schools it's very different," she said, noting that around exam time, Libby can help liven up an atmosphere and lower the anxiety and stress levels around studying.

"There's a lot of anxiety in the school system," she said. "We see great benefits."

Lacombe says she and her dogs attended Halton Hills hockey tryouts as well, where nervous players crowded around the furry therapists, helping divert their focus from worrying about their plays.

The St. John Ambulance therapy dogs will be at the Georgetown Marketplace on Aug. 25 to help relieve some stress for back to school shoppers and to help recruit more therapy dogs in the area.

"The key, a lot of people think, is extreme training," she said. "What we're looking for is a well-behaved pet."

For more information about the therapy dog program, visit the St. John Ambulance website.

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