



# COMMUNITY

## Canine visitors light up seniors' faces

By Stephanie Thiessen  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

An elderly gentleman is sitting in a wheelchair, staring out the window at a grey parking lot. He looks lonely and his eyes are empty. What he's thinking, nobody knows and he seldom expresses.

But when Duchess the greyhound walks up to him along with owner Marlene Gallinger, his face lights up and he's a changed man.

He doesn't say anything, and doesn't need to. Gently, Gallinger takes his thin, frail hand and places it on Duchess' back, saying softly, "Would you like to pet her? She's very soft."

For a minute, the years melt away. Maybe this man — one of many residents at Allendale long-term care centre — remembers the soft fur of a dear pet from years ago, as so many residents do when they pet Duchess.

Or maybe it's the unconditional acceptance he sees in Duchess' brown eyes that brings him to life. Whatever it is, Duchess has just made another friend. Mission accomplished. Before long, it's time for the pair to move on.

### Popular visitors

Gallinger and Duchess are visitors with St. John Ambulance's Therapy Dog Program. Once each week, they visit the residents as well as the clients at the Milton Place and Friends Landing day programs, providing some companionship and a change in daily routines.

Duchess has the ability to break through any language or intellectual barriers, Gallinger explained, since talking isn't necessary for a meaningful exchange.

She said she's often surprised by residents who look as though they don't want to be bothered.

"That's when it's really exciting. Sometimes someone will be sitting in a chair with their head down, looking very dejected and I try to decide if I should disturb them," she said. "The next thing I know, they have their head up and they're smiling."

Carolynne Malinowski, life enrichment co-ordinator at Allendale, has seen Duchess and the other dogs in action, and said it's hard to put into words the bond that forms.

"It's just pure love and unconditional trust" that the dogs demonstrate, she said.

She's seen time and again seniors who

are otherwise unresponsive light up when an animal visits.

"Their whole demeanour changes," she said.

Gallinger has had Duchess, an eight-year-old former racing dog, for two years. She adopted her from the Greyhound Lovers of Hamilton-Wentworth (GLOHW) program after serving as a foster parent.

"She was such an amazing dog, I just kept her," Gallinger said, smiling.

GLOHW takes in ex-racing greyhounds from U.S. tracks and finds them good homes. Duchess was a race dog in Florida in her former life, Gallinger said.

### Natural fit

Some members of the group introduced Gallinger to the Therapy Dog Program, and it seemed like a natural fit for Duchess, she said.

"I wanted to share her with people."

There's no required type of dog for the program — anyone with a canine who's gentle and sweet is a candidate.

The next stop on Duchess' tour is the two adult day programs. Judging from reactions, you'd think the Duchess of York had just walked into the room as opposed to Duchess the greyhound.

The room has temporarily erupted, with nearly everyone in the room stopping what they're doing to greet the spotted dog.

"It's Duchess!" voices ring out.

John Collins stops his game of cards to pay the dog some attention, and comments on the importance of the pet-visiting program.

"It keeps them out of the dumps," he said, referring to the residents and day program clients.

Residents pepper Gallinger with questions about Duchess.

"Does she bark?" one asks.

Gallinger said she can't think of a single time she's barked.

Duchess' height — she's knee high — makes it easy for residents in wheelchairs to reach out and pet her. And they do — almost all of them.

After about an hour of visiting, it's time for Gallinger to take Duchess home.

"Even though it doesn't seem like work, Duchess gets tired after a while," she said.

So the pair calls it a day, leaving many smiles in their wake.

Stephanie Thiessen can be reached at [sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com](mailto:sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com).



Marlene Gallinger and her eight-year-old Greyhound 'Duchess' visit with senior Joan LaPierre at Allendale. GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

TV COGECO

Truly Local Television

[www.cogeco.ca](http://www.cogeco.ca)

NORTH HALTON STUDIO

Laurier Plaza

500 Laurier Avenue

Milton, ON L9T 4R3

905-878-9306

### Cogeco Cable Channel 14

### Programming Schedule — Tuesday, October 3 - Monday, October 9, 2006

Tuesday, October 3	Wednesday, October 4	Thursday, October 5	Friday, October 6	Saturday, October 7	Sunday, October 8	Monday, October 9
8:00am - 10:00am Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - Noon Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 11:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 10:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
10:00am Dr. Jane Goddall Live from TV Cogeco Windsor	1:00pm Halton Hills Awards & Council (cc)	Noon Swap Talk (Replay) Milton Council	1:00pm Halton Region Council (cc)	4:00pm TVC Sports: Halton High School Sr. Football Notre Dame vs Bateman	10:30am TVC Sports: Halton High School Sr. Football Notre Dame vs Bateman	1:00pm Halton Hills Council (cc)
Noon - 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	6:00pm - 7:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA	1:00pm - 9:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	4:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	6:30pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	1:00pm - 6:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	4:00pm - 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
1:00pm SportsZone Live (Replay)	7:30pm Simply Halton - Energy from Waste Swap Talk (Live) Milton Council	4:00pm - 9:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA			6:00pm Halton Hills Council (cc)	8:00pm SportsZONE Live
2:00pm - 6:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00pm	9:00pm			9:00pm	Halton Healthcare Services
6:30pm Optimist TV Bingo (Live)	9:00pm				9:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	10:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA
7:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA						
8:00pm Auto Experts (Live)						
9:00pm Halton Hills Council (cc)						