



SERVICE DOGS HELP VETERANS

Who is not only man's best friend, but can also predict seizures, assist people in wheelchairs, help those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, and even help to keep children safe?

Service dogs.

Due to the number of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with head injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder, amputations and spinal cord injuries, the demand for service dogs may be at an all-time high. Adding to that demand are requests from civilians for service dogs who can do everything from alert to peanut products (for children with peanut allergies) to helping kids with autism.

Impressed by seeing how a service dog changed the life of an injured veteran, newly elected Sen. Al Franken set out to make service dogs easier to come by for veterans. A bill he introduced to do just that was tacked onto the Defense Authorization Act, easily passed by the U.S. Senate on July 23.

The bill is unique; one which Franken described in a phone interview as laying the groundwork for a "pilot program," which he says will lead to a study on the benefits of service dogs.



The idea of helping veterans get service dogs grew out of an inauguration event where Franken

met Capt. Luis Carlos

Montalvan, an intelligence officer who served in Iraq. Montalvan was injured in an assassination attempt. Today, he walks with a cane and suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder.

"The Captain told me how he would never be functioning in society if it wasn't for his beautiful Golden Retriever (service dog), Tuesday," says Franken. "And he certainly wouldn't have made the inauguration event because he had become agoraphobic (fearful of being in public places). I learned what Tuesday can do for him. It's amazing stuff. Tuesday can anticipate and fend off panic attacks. He senses Luis' breathing patterns and perspiration and then nuzzles him to calm him down. He lets Luis know when it's time for his medication, and won't allow him not to take it. And he'll wake Luis up if he's experiencing a nightmare."

The cost of training service dogs doesn't come cheap. This bill calls for the VA to train and match 50 dogs with 50 veterans. The training for every other subsequent service dog will be paid for by the VA, with private agencies participating to help

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BY STEVE DALE

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find dogs, train them and match them with veterans (as well as civilians). The cost is about \$50,000 for each dog, including training of the dog and the partner ultimately matched with the animal, as well as care for the dog and staff expenses during the training period.

"I believe the program will easily pay for itself," stated Franken. "We'll study it, but I bet there may be fewer drugs needed to alleviate depression and other psychological-related problems, even fewer suicides, which we know is high among veterans. There will likely be fewer human caretakers needed for people with service dogs. And many of these people will be able to contribute to society, where previously they weren't."

Franken's family dog passed away this year. "I know how much dogs mean to a family, and I care about veterans' needs," he says. "I'm so glad this has moved forward." 🐾



Photo Courtesy of Al Franken

HAPPY AND SAFE HOLIDAYS FOR PETS

Halloween, Thanksgiving and the cheery holiday season create memories that last a lifetime. But, costumes, repeated visitors, pranks, and sweets can be upsetting, unhealthy or even deadly for pets. "Chocolate, trick-or-treaters, candies, and rich foods are a part of holiday traditions for many families, but for the smallest and most vulnerable household members these treats can be dangerous, sometimes deadly," warns Dr. Larry R. Corry, president of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). "Pets are not people, so make sure you celebrate with appropriate treats."



Here are some AVMA holiday safety tips:

- **Don't feed dogs and cats table scraps:** Don't allow a family dog to sit under the table during meals, where

children may slip her food. Gravy, fatty meat and poultry skin can cause life-threatening conditions like pancreatitis and gastrointestinal problems; and poultry bones can splinter and create bowel obstructions.

- **Keep candy away:** Chocolate contains theobromine, which is toxic to dogs and cats. The darker the chocolate (baking chocolate being the darkest) the more dangerous it is to pets. And Xyletol, an artificial sweetener, is also poisonous to dogs. Leaving Halloween candy out can cause cavities for your kids, and serious illness in pets with a sweet tooth.
- **Consider keeping your pet in a separate room, away from the door, when trick-or-treaters arrive.** Strange people in even stranger clothes can frighten some pets. If your pet is particularly fearful, see your veterinarian before Halloween. Visit www.avma.org for more information. 🐾

PROTECTING YOUR PET AND WILDLIFE TOO

BY JOAN EMBERY

Over 72 million people own dogs. Over 82 million people own cats. Over 11 million people own birds. Over seven million people own horses. I am one of those people who has all of these animals.

One half of pet owners consider pets to be family members and I am also one of them. Jessie, my Doberman, is part of my family. She is my constant companion – never far from my side as I carry out my chores on the ranch. I also share my home with a Bengal cat named Taj who rules the house.

Animals dominate every aspect of my life and have since my early childhood. I cannot imagine life without them.

However, unlike most pet owners, I also live and work with wildlife. They are not pets, but rather representatives of our natural world – a world of diversity, beauty, resilience and balance. Each of these animals represents unique ecosystems under pressure. My job is to help educate our audiences about their role in conservation.

Humans and their pets are impacted by wildlife, just as wildlife is impacted by humans and their pets. The most important link is humans. Free-ranging, unsupervised pets can be subjected to injury, predation and disease. Dogs can be killed by porcupines, sprayed by skunks, bitten by poisonous snakes and attacked by coyotes and mountain lions. Cats can be preyed upon by large raptors and carnivores. Some wildlife species are known to carry diseases such as rabies, plague and tularemia, which can be transmitted to pets, and sometimes their owners.

Our pets can impact wildlife, particularly species already declining due to diminished resources and habitats. Pet predation could take them from endangered to extinct.



Photo Courtesy of Joan Embery

Diseases transmitted from domestic animals to wildlife can be devastating. Distemper and rabies have wiped out populations of lions and wild dogs in Africa, Timber wolves in Glacier National Park, Black-footed ferrets in the Midwest, and Mexican wolves in New Mexico and Arizona. Toxoplasmosis has killed endangered sea otters off the coast of California where storm drains transport cat feces into their aquatic habitat. Keeping your pets vaccinated and using a parasite preventive protects your pets and lessens potential impact on wildlife.

Do not take wildlife for pets. It is illegal, potentially dangerous, and most people aren't equipped to care for them – as a result many are just let go to fend for themselves. Most die and others impact native species. For example, Burmese pythons have now populated Florida and their numbers are increasing – placing native wildlife and pets in peril.

When I end my day on the ranch and finally crawl into bed, my dog and cat often join me. It's nice to know they are healthy and safe because, after all, they are part of the family. 🐾



FROM STEVE DALE
MY PETS' TROUBLES

Q: When I read the newspaper, or even when I read Pawprints, Samantha instantly appears from somewhere else in the house. It's like an alarm has gone off, and now her mission is to push the newspaper, or whatever I'm reading, out of my hands. She constantly meows in my lap, until I finally put down the newspaper. I love reading the daily paper and enjoy Pawprints. But, apparently Samantha doesn't believe I should. M.D., Atlanta, GA

A: I'll try not to take this personally, and assume that Samantha isn't offended in some way by my newspaper stories or Pawprints. Cats are very good people trainers. Samantha has learned that when she demands attention, she gets it. She meows, you eventually put the paper down, and I bet that's followed by you petting her.

Before you begin reading the paper or Pawprints, take an interactive cat toy, like a fishing pole-type toy with feathers or fabric, and play with Samantha for ten minutes or so. Then, offer a few treats following the game. Odds are that she'll snooze.

To ensure she doesn't disturb you and to change the pattern of her behavior—head to your own litter box (that's right, the bathroom) with your reading material. After 15 minutes or so reappear and take your reading material to your favorite spot to relax. If Samantha pesters you, head to the bathroom again. Eventually, Samantha will learn that the only way for you to remain in sight when you read is for her not to be a nuisance.

Email questions about your pets' behavior troubles to info@pawprintsnewsletter.com.



MIRACLE PETS BY STEVE DALE

MONTREAL, CANADA. Miracles can happen. Or are they really miracles? Pets who theoretically shouldn't be alive today appeared at a press conference at the Forum of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine/Canadian Veterinary Medical Association Convention on June 4 at the Palais des Congrès de Montréal.

"We knew dogs could get cancer but didn't know about chemotherapy for dogs," said Douglas Hamblin of Pierrefonds, Quebec Canada. About a year ago, his 8-year old Samoyed began refusing food – which was definitely out of character. A large mass was discovered in Nanook's chest, and increasingly he was having difficulty breathing. His diagnosis was an aggressive cancer called intrathoracic histiocytic sarcoma. Most dogs succumb, even with treatment. Today, Nanook is in remission. Most important, his appetite and quality of life have returned. "He takes food off the counters like a vacuum, but we love him," Hamblin says.

"I wasn't at all convinced at first that chemo could help such an old cat," said Sylvie Bermingham of Eastman, Quebec. Now, 18 years old, Pistache was diagnosed with inoperable oral squamous cell carcinoma just over a year ago. Increasingly Pistache had been having difficulty eating and was noticeably suffering. "The decision had to be made," she said, "Either I was going to put Pistache to sleep (euthanize) or treat him. It was a quality of life decision."

When offered hope by Dr. Louis Phillippe de Lorimier, a veterinary oncologist in nearby Brossard, Bermingham, she opted for treatments. "My only requirement was that Pistache was always made to feel comfortable," she said. Today, Pistache is an old lady, a cancer survivor, and every now and again, she still brings back a mouse."

While various cancers were the focus of this press conference, ACVIM veterinary specialists also specialize in large and small animal internal medicine, cardiology and neurology.

Sylvain Gadoua of Sorel-Tracey, Quebec has had Great Danes before. So when his puppy, Sam, began to act differently, he first assumed

the symptoms to be puppy rapid bone growth. Sam was having trouble walking, and moaned in pain. Gadoua, who clearly is a macho kind of guy, even slept with his suffering dog overnight hoping to comfort him. No one had an answer. Gadoua said, "I was just about to tell the kids we were sending Sam to 'doggy heaven.' At that moment, Sam approached with a toy, asking me to play. I took that as a sign that he wasn't ready to die."

Dr. Andrea Finnen, an ACVIM neurological candidate at the University of Montreal, Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec said that Sam, who was just under a year old, was admitted to the veterinary teaching hospital. She expressed some pessimism even when figuring out the diagnosis, called Diskospondylitis (an infection in the vertebrae). However, after an aggressive regiment of antibiotics and forced inactivity (to allow healing), Sam is now pretty much a normal Great Dane. Struggling to hold back tears, Gadoua said, "I was amazed when Sam ran through the woods again. If our politicians want to really learn about health care, they should pay attention to what veterinarians do – and their compassion." 🐾

"If our politicians want to really learn about health care, they should pay attention to what veterinarians do – and their compassion."



FEATURED WEBSITES

1. Steve Dale
www.stevedalepetworld.com
www.petworldradio.net
2. American College of Veterinary Behaviorists
www.dacvb.org
3. American Heartworm Society
www.heartwormsociety.org
4. American Humane Association
www.americanhumane.org
5. American Veterinary Society Animal Behavior
www.avsabonline.org
6. Animal Behavior Resources Institute
www.abrionline.org
7. Companion Animal Parasite Council
www.petsandparasites.org
8. International Association of Assistance Dog Partners
www.iaadp.org
9. Veterinary Specialists
www.acvim.org
10. Winn Feline Foundation
www.winnfelinehealth.org



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