

American Humane Association™

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Animal-Assisted Therapy

Team of the Month – October 2011

Debbie Nielsen & Chloe



I had wanted to have a pet partner for five years and in November 2009, Chloe was born. She was the last one in the litter of Golden Retrieves and was 10 weeks old when she came into our family. She was our third dog and I was hoping she would be a good candidate for a therapy dog.

Chloe was, and still is, a very intense and energized dog. We have attended many, many training classes and Chloe has done very well in all of them except the Canine Good Citizen class. She was not too excited to have to participate in the “left out of sight & in a stay” portion of the test as her favorite place is by my side! We practiced and practiced. After hiding behind countless trees, corners, anything I could think of, she finally felt comfortable enough to pass the CGC with flying colors.



Our next class was a Handler Training Workshop which prepares you to become a Therapy Team. Chloe and I were developing a very close relationship by this time and we passed our Team Evaluation without a hitch.

While we waited for our paperwork to be returned, I had a major health issue and ended up in the hospital. Chloe became my own personal therapy dog. Once everything calmed down and I started feeling stronger, Chloe and I hit the therapy trail running. I had surgery in October, and a few weeks later we were helping out at Team Evaluations with Chloe serving as the “neutral” dog.

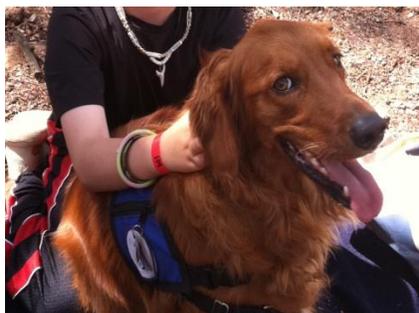
Now, instead of Chloe being only my personal therapy dog, I am able to share her with everyone. She is so friendly and loving that she touches everyone she meets.

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We started visiting at Littleton Life Care Center and Chloe was a natural! She wanted to go into EVERY room and would look up at me at each doorway as if to say “this one ... can we visit here?” Our first visits were only for 20 minutes but soon she could handle longer periods of time.

Recently, Chloe had a chance to be a Therapy Dog at a YMCA camp. One memorable experience was when she met a young boy who had been having lots of difficult times over the last few years. The boy's father had been deployed overseas several times and for long periods of time and you could tell life was sometimes overwhelming for the



child. He struggled with school activities and in social situations. Chloe and I happened upon him while he was at the climbing wall, sitting to the side, watching the other campers scurry up and down the wall. When he spotted Chloe he immediately came over to us and introduced himself and started talking. He was thrilled to spend time with Chloe and told us stories about his home and his own dogs. He wanted his picture taken

with Chloe so it could be sent to his Mom. His smile truly lit up his face.

Sometimes you don't know whether the connections made are fleeting or truly having an impact. I wondered if the photo would ever be forwarded to his Mom. Apparently it was and his Mom took time to write a note to the camp director asking that we be thanked for being at the camp. She said that because of interaction with Chloe, the young boy had something to talk about with the other campers and he started to feel part of the group. It was one of the first times that he felt like he fit in and he was eagerly awaiting a chance to go back to camp and perhaps get to see Chloe again.

What a moment. I am so privileged to have a wonderful pet partner like Chloe. And, I am proud to be a member of the American Humane Association.

– Debbie Nielsen

