

Avalanche's Story



I can't tell you how proud I am to be selected as "Team of the Month." As I read the e-mail to Avalanche, she nudged my arm as if to say, "that's right, mom, we're the best and I'm top dog!" It is truly an honor to be awarded this recognition.

Let me start at the beginning. On September 2, 2002 our chocolate lab gave birth to seven puppies; one white, five chocolate and one yellow. Before their birth, my husband and I agreed that we would not keep any of the puppies since we had three other dogs. Avalanche was Auggie's first puppy and when she was born she was snow white. My husband and my two children quickly out-voted me and Avalanche became a member our family.

Avalanche was completely bonded with my husband and they were inseparable. We have a business and she was the official mascot. She greeted all our customers with a wag of her tail. Wherever we went, Avalanche was there.

In January of 2005, my husband, son and I went on vacation to Mexico. There was a tragic accident and only my son and I returned. This life-changing turn of events left me devastated and it was clear that Avalanche knew there had been a major change in our family. Our bond became incredibly strong and she helped me through the many tearful days and nights that followed. Thank God my husband talked me into keeping her. I believe it was meant to be.

Our little family continued our lives without Joe. Avalanche and I became inseparable, we went everywhere together and she continued to be my company's mascot.

I had never heard much about therapy dogs. One day while sponsoring the Adams County Fair, Kathie Young approached Avalanche and I. Kathie is Director of Volunteer Services at Platte Valley Medical Center (PVMC) in Brighton. She connected with Avalanche immediately and planted the seed about her therapy dog program at the hospital.

I started doing some research and thought maybe it was just what Avalanche and I needed. After successfully completing the Pet Partners Training workshop, passing the evaluation which tests a handler-animal team for skills and aptitude to do therapy work, and Avalanche completing a thorough health screening, we were registered as a Pet Partners therapy team in June of 2007 and were quickly on board with the other PVMC teams.



PVMC had just opened a new hospital so we started on the ground floor at the Grand Opening. It was a huge event but Avalanche took it all in stride. Nothing fazed her that day. We were welcomed by everyone. Since then, we visit the hospital twice a week in all areas from Emergency to ICU. We also spend time at the flu shot and Tri County Health clinics which are sponsored by PVMC at their campus.

Avalanche's favorite part of her visits, along with all the love and attention she gives, is visiting with staff. She provides as much "therapy" to them as she does to the patients and guests. They know her schedule and make a point of being at their desks to see her. (Of course the treats they have stashed are probably an incentive.) The staff visitations are as beneficial to Avalanche as they are to the staff. I believe that Avalanche is greatly rewarded for the work she does by the way she is loved and cared for by her PVMC family.

I have tried to teach Avalanche to shake since she was a puppy. She would just look at me like I was crazy. The staff in ICU didn't buy that, in the past month they finally convinced Avalanche that it was a great greeting and now she's pretty proud of her new "trick."

It is truly amazing to know that just a short visit with a patient and their family can make such a difference. When I leave a room after watching Avalanche perform her magic the feeling is remarkable. A dog's unconditional love has an amazing effect on all of us. I am so proud to be a part of such a special team.

A few months ago we visited an elderly woman who hadn't been able to sleep in a couple of days. As we entered the room, we saw her sitting in her chair. She was very distraught. When she saw Avalanche, a wonderful smile came across her face. She talked to her gently as Avalanche nudged her hand. She continued to stroke Avalanche softly until Avalanche curled up at her feet. As I watched, she continued to speak to Avalanche while stroking her head. Before I knew it Avalanche and the woman had both fallen into a deep sleep. The nurses were ecstatic. They carefully put the woman to bed without waking her and Avalanche and I quietly slipped out and off to our next visit.



Even after working a full day at my own job, sometimes feeling tired or rushed, I find my visits at the hospital rejuvenating. All I have to do is get Avalanche's vest and her head is up, tail waving and she's headed for the car. I leave the hospital after my visits with such a wonderful feeling. There are no words to describe how satisfied and fulfilled these visits make me feel.

Avalanche truly came into my life for a reason and being a Denver Pet Partner has allowed me to give back so much happiness to others.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to be a part of your wonderful organization.

Susan Deniston
...and Avalanche

