



**Ken, Sue and Cooper Majeski: *From Dog Therapy to Therapy Dog***



Ken and Sue Majeski adopted Cooper through Colorado Wyoming Vizsla Rescue in 2012 when he was 7 years old. Cooper had been surrendered by a breeder who used him for stud purposes. They don't know much of his history, but it appears that he was kept as a commodity and not a pet. Upon his arrival at their home, he needed to be oriented to household living. Cooper had to be taught to go up and down stairs; and on his first day he walked into a sliding glass door. More serious than the physical changes, were the mental adjustments to having a loving family instead of a (presumed) solitary life in a

kennel. Cooper kept to himself, would not respond to affection and refused to make eye contact. With the help of an excellent trainer, they managed to gain the confidence of the dog and slowly earn his respect. While Cooper will never be a warm and cuddly dog, he is extremely calm and patient. He will allow a small child to climb all over him, and loves to have his ears stroked. These traits seemed to be a great qualifier for a therapy dog.

A chance meeting with a Denver Pet Partners member at the dog park led the Majeskis to DPP. As they looked into the training and testing, it was clear that Cooper still needed a lot of confidence-building before he would pass the exams. It was June 2013, only 12 months after they had adopted him when Sue signed up for the August training course and dog testing in September, giving her 3 months to prepare.

To acquaint him with crowds, Ken and Sue took him for daily walks, progressing from remote paths to busy parks to farmers' markets and street fairs. The staff in Home Depot and most of the stores in Aspen Grove got to know the three of them as they walked through their doors. When they explained their goals, the merchants couldn't have been kinder. Ken and Sue were amazed at how many dog biscuits Cooper collected on those daily walks. They had to watch his weight. They discovered that Cooper was terrified of different floors: concrete floors, tile floors, wood floors, crowded floors, empty floors. They walked, walked and then walked some more. Eventually he learned that he could not only navigate those terrifying floors, but even sit down on them! They were making progress. As the testing date grew closer, their efforts intensified. They taped a mock testing grid to the living room floor. Our local community center also allowed them to tape a grid to *their* floor and they practiced, practiced, practiced.



Finally, the testing day arrived and they drove to Platte Valley Hospital in Brighton. It was the week of the great Colorado floods of 2013 and storm clouds were filling the skies as they arrived. Cooper was a champ. He trotted through the exercises like an old pro. Granted, he wasn't perfect...he tried to jump into the examiners lap! During the test, the fire alarms went off, the PA announced that the hospital was being evacuated due to flood threats, and various people were running in and out of the room trying to assess the changing situation. Somehow, despite the pandemonium, Cooper passed!

Less than a year later, Ken decided to become a handler too. Once again they spent months with tape on the living room carpet. Cooper passed his exam again. What a dog!

Both Ken and Sue wish to tie their therapy dog visits to some of their other interests. Sue has been an advocate for reading for years and has experience with adult literacy training. She and Cooper went on to become R.E.A.D. registered and are active with reading programs at local libraries. Once a month the Sue/Cooper team goes to the library where children have fun reading books to Cooper. At least one young fan has become so taken with it that he made his mother cancel a dental appointment so that he could read to Cooper.

More recently, Sue and Cooper began helping tutor a boy who was denied early reading experiences and is currently 6 years behind. This is a much more active role for the Sue/Cooper team and much more demanding. The youngster is currently bonding well to Cooper and making slow but sure progress. Sue also has a background in medical research and is hoping to participate in research trials seeking to scientifically validate the positive effects of therapy pets.

After seeing how well Cooper interacted with a paraplegic neighbor, and upon his suggestion, Ken and Cooper participate in the Craig Rehabilitation Hospital "Pet a Pup" pet therapy program. Craig integrates its pet therapy program throughout the entire fabric of the hospital. On any given visit, Cooper and Ken can find themselves not only visiting with patients but also working with them in their physical therapy sessions. As they walk through the 3 therapy gyms, a physical therapist might call them over to just give their patient a break; to use Cooper to encourage hand and arm motions by attempting to pet him or even to have Cooper jump up on the elevated exercise mat and lie next to the patient for comfort while the therapist performs strenuous and sometimes painful stretching manipulations. Because Craig also trains the families of spinal cord and brain injury patients there are usually spouses, children and parents of patients in the hospital and many of them are very glad to have Cooper come over and give



## *DPP Team of the Month (May 2015)*

DENVER PET PARTNERS



them a break from their very stressful routines. The families, especially the children, seem to particularly appreciate Cooper's gentle, calm demeanor. They often make a point of arranging for Cooper to spend time with them during every visit. Even the staff is encouraged to take "pet a pup" breaks and look forward to visits from Cooper.

Having served in the Marine Corps, Ken is also very interested in veterans' health issues and is looking forward to future opportunities to work with our veterans.

To Ken and Sue's thinking, Denver Pet Partners is the best of all worlds. As retirees, they get out of the house and into the community where they meet wonderful people. It also gives them a chance to share their loving pet with others, hopefully making the lives of others a little happier.

