

Georgeann Steffens and Piper



Wow, it is an honor to be chosen as a Denver Pet Partner Team of the Month. It is also one of the hardest assignments I have ever had to do.

I first became involved with Delta Society (now called Pet Partners) in 2001 with a black lab named Misty. I had raised her for an assistance dog organization in Kansas and she was returned to me because of kennel stress. I knew that Misty would be a perfect READ dog so a good friend and I approached the local library about setting up a READ program. The library was very excited to have a new program that

would encourage children to come into the library so after my friend and I traveled to Salt Lake City to meet with the founder of R.E.A.D. we began the first program of this kind in Grand County. The program was a great success and continued for several years until I moved to Colorado Springs in 2005.



In 2006, I obtained Piper, my current Pet Partner, from a breeder in Iowa. He had been donating pups to the school in Kansas for many years and I was currently raising one of Piper's half-brothers to be an assistance dog. He had a very laidback and loving disposition so when I heard that Rollie's mother was going to have a litter of pups, I put my name on the list to get one. I picked up Piper in January of 2006, at of 9 weeks of age. Piper was an amazing pup and initially passed his Delta test at the age of 14 months. We did not do much visiting at that time and it was not until I got involved with the Denver Pet Partners that we actually started visiting.

Piper and I were one of the first teams to go through the steps to become therapy dogs at Evans Army Hospital on Fort Carson in Colorado Springs. We also visited an Alzheimer's facility for a few years before deciding that the Paws to Read

program with the Pikes Peak Library System was where we needed to be. Initially both Piper and Misty did weekly visits at East Library in Colorado Springs. It was amazing to see how both Misty and Piper were able to help children overcome their fear of dogs.

Piper and I now visit at the Rockrimmon Library twice a month where Piper has many “read groupies”. On one of our visits at the library, a mother to one of our regular groupies sat down next to Piper and started crying while she petted him. They had put their lab to sleep the day before and Piper was able to comfort her as she told me what had happened.

I had a mom tell me just the other day that her daughter never liked to read. Her other daughter was afraid of large dogs. They started coming to the library a couple of years ago and reading to Piper has changed their attitude towards reading and dogs. The younger one now loves to come to the library to sit with Piper, often using him as a backrest, plus she loves to read at home. The older girl loves reading to Piper and has overcome her fear of large dogs. I do not have many



heartwarming stories other than the fact that many parents tell me that their kids insist on coming to the library on Wednesday afternoons. They love to sit with Piper, some read to him and some just want to pet him but they are at the library. To me, reading is one of the most important things to learn and love; introducing children to the library at an early age helps encourage this activity and the Paws to Read dogs do it in a very positive way.

Piper and I love going to the library but we are also busy training and competing in obedience and agility. Piper has many rally and obedience titles including his UD (utility dog) and too many agility titles to even list. He truly is a well-rounded dog but he is best known as Champion Couch Potato!!!.