



Michael and Linda Tieman - with Dillon and Darby



When Denver Pet Partners contacted us to write about our experiences with our two registered golden retrievers, I paused for a time, as I did not know where to begin in describing the 12+ year journey with our therapy dogs. With Dillon and Darby, Mike and I have evaluated 10 times each with Pet Partners. I will start with Dillon who found us in 2005. We were still grieving the loss of our previous 14-year-old golden and we were not interested in adding another dog to our household at that time. However, I began

volunteering with the Golden Rescue in Arizona (where we lived at the time) and I was called upon to do an owner surrender. The surrendering family was concerned about their 8-month golden being stalked by coyotes as he was outside dog. They felt that they could not adequately care for Dillon inside and he had been banished to an outdoor kennel. Their gift from Grandma of a cute little golden puppy grew into an unmanageable 90-lb. adolescent dog. He had never been on a leash and he knocked people over. When I arrived, I found this young, beautiful, and very large golden retriever. I brought him back to our home to keep him overnight. He was handsome, but it was clear that he lacked any training and was frantic for attention. He got away from me as I tried to remove him from my car, and he dashed across our yard to our departed goldens grave, and plopped himself down. I sat by him and he rested his head on my lap. It was a sign. He was going require a lot of work and training, but, it was difficult to ignore this powerful event. We decided to adopt him and named him Dillon. He was intelligent and learned quickly, and in one week, he was housebroken and leash trained. We retired to Loveland, Colorado and Mike and I were both eager to get involved in volunteer work. One day, while out for lunch, I met a couple that had two therapy dogs. They recounted their experiences with their dogs, and Mike and I reflected on Dillon's qualities and decided



that we would get involved in Pet Therapy. We attended the Pet Partners workshop and Mike and I, with Dillon, became the first team at Medical Center of the Rockies in Loveland. I must admit that I was skeptical of the benefits of therapy dogs, but thought that at the very least, we could bring some warm fuzzies to patients. I had no idea, however, of how the experiences with Dillon would change my life. Although very energetic, Dillon was a natural. He loved to be petted and hugged, and he enjoyed contact. He made everyone feel as if they were his only interest. I have never had a dog that enjoys being cuddled as much as Dillon. People could wrap themselves around him and he would melt into their arms. Mike and I have had many experiences that will remain with us forever. Dillon has comforted grieving families, people who lost their home and pets in the 2013 flood, and a woman who lost her unborn baby and her Bernese Mountain Dog in a terrible accident. Dillon helped a young girl in a coma “wake up” when her mother placed the girl’s hand on Dillon’s soft head. Mike and I have been Dillon’s partner in many types of therapy situations including his work at Medical Center of the Rockies, Skyridge Medical Center, Castle Rock and Parker Adventist Hospitals, libraries, community colleges, Rocky Vista University, the airport, and middle school grief counseling. Dillon has also helped me conduct home visits for the Golden Rescue over the years.



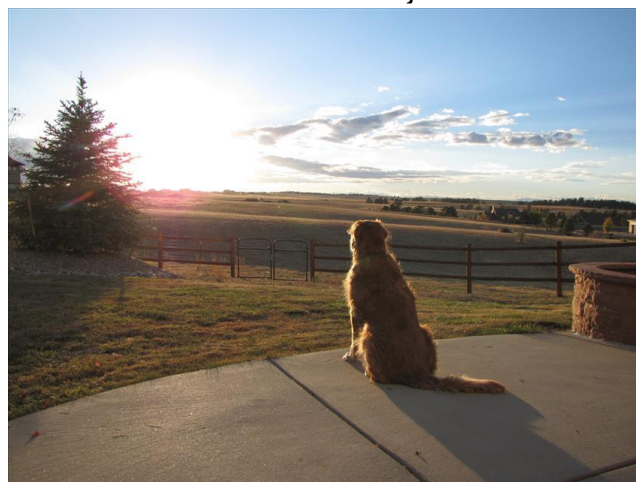
In 2009 we decided to add another golden retriever to our family. Darby was also a rescue who had been picked up by animal control after being abandoned in a back yard when his family moved away. He was a scared, sick, and malnourished one-year old dog when the golden retriever rescue organization found him a foster family. When we adopted him, he was a dog who needed a lot of help getting over the trauma of abuse and abandonment. But

with time and care, his “inner golden” came out and he also became part of our Therapy Dog team. We named him Darby because it means free man in Irish and he was truly a



little leprechaun of a dog. He “told” us that he wanted to do therapy work one day when we were putting Dillon’s therapy dog vest on, and Darby tried to push Dillon aside to get under the vest. Darby worked at many of the same venues as Dillon. One of Darby’s favorite activities was participating in the Teddy Bear Hospital. He loved children, and of course, there were lots of stuffed toys! Darby was an affectionate and whimsical golden. He loved his work and would get very excited when we would pull up to the hospital or medical school. Darby had the ability to engage people with his gaze, and he had a fan club that provided him with lots of toys (he had a collection that filled two toy boxes) that he carried around proudly. Darby had many health challenges over the years, but he was always very puppy-like and playful. We lost him in May to lymphoma. He was 10 years old.

Dillon and Darby both loved having a job. As I am sure a lot of people with Therapy Dogs understand, dogs are intuitive about human needs. But most importantly, they are companions and best friends. Dillon and Darby have accompanied us on countless hikes, and RV camping and ski trips, and these are memories that we will always hold close to our hearts. Through our partners, Dillon and Darby, we have had the opportunity to touch many people. At almost 13 years old, Dillon, has had a long and purposeful life and he continues his work with us. Although Dillon’s days of long walks through the hospital corridors are ending, he will continue to do “lobby duty” and be an Ambassador for Castle Rock and Parker Hospitals where he was the first therapy dog. Dillon will also



continue to visit the medical students at Rocky Vista University. As he slows down, long naps in the sun, shorter walks, treats, and an occasional “snow bath” are his retirement plans. A full and purposeful life is what we all strive for and both Dillon and Darby, have had their mission fulfilled. Mike and I have tremendous gratitude for the kind and generous spirit of these two companions which have allowed us to fulfill our purpose in volunteering. After Dillon joins Darby one day, I will continue to help Castle Rock and Parker Hospitals with the coordination of their programs and Mike will continue to coordinate with DPP on the Therapy Program at Rocky Vista University. And, in time, we will watch for the “sign” to invite another furry companion into our lives.

DPP Team of the Month (December 2017)

