



Tails for You

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the medical world.**

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Facility Dog Riggs is making possibilities realities

Annika and Krista, Child Life Specialists at Children's Hospital MN, explain that a hospital can be a scary environment—especially for kids. One of their new co-workers, Facility Dog Riggs—wearing his name badge “Riggs, MD: Medical Dogtor”—takes it all in stride though. Krista says, “The hospital is such an unpredictable place with different sounds and different patients, but he never fails to remain his steady self.”



Annika and Krista began serving as Riggs' primary and secondary handlers, respectively, in mid-2023. With Annika, Riggs helps children on both a medical-surgical unit and the Center for the Treatment of Eating Disorders (CTED). Krista works with patients, from toddlers to young adults, in the Child Life Zone, where they can engage in play opportunities (sports, arts and crafts, technology activities, etc.).



In his role on the “med-surg” unit, Riggs uses his calming presence to normalize difficult circumstances. One way is by encouraging post-surgical patients to walk. Krista explains, “A dog can be very motivating to get them up and moving. Taking Riggs for a walk makes it so much easier.” He can also role-play hospital procedures. For instance, a girl with sensory issues was having a tough time taking medicine. But once she watched Riggs drink out of a syringe, she responded, “Now it's my turn.” Similarly, a boy experiencing a panic attack found relief through Riggs. This 10-year-old had been constantly pacing, and no humans—including his parents—were making progress with the situation. Annika brought in Riggs, had the two snuggle together, and prompted the boy to match the dog's breathing. “Riggs completely diffused the panic attack,” says Annika. “I remember the boy looking at me and saying ‘I feel safe.’ His parents said, ‘We've never heard him say that.’” The boy later confirmed his reaction, proclaiming, “You know, Riggs actually works.”



As part of his work with CTED, Riggs hangs out with patients in a special dining room. He helps foster the idea that eating is a community experience. Riggs has his own mat in the room, and when patients finish their meal, they are welcome to spend some time with him. Although he behaves like a perfect gentleman while in this room, he apparently drools like a waterfall when it's time for his own meals. One patient with an eating disorder watching him once joked, “Oh someday I hope I can eat like you.” Krista adds, “These patients can feel a lot of judgment, but Riggs never judges them. He's there, and they can come as they

are and know that he's just a calming, encouraging presence for them."

Maybe that safe feeling is partly why patients adore Riggs so much. At the Child Life Zone, they love playing fetch with him and using his paw to make a clay print to take home. One girl made a bow tie for him out of felt while another crafted a friendship bracelet that's still around his collar. Annika even senses that Riggs remembers kids he's seen before. "You can tell when he's meeting someone new versus "Hey, Friend."

Even one of their Somali co-workers has become a fan. Though never having touched a dog before, she petted Riggs and is now on a mission to tell others, "You've gotta touch this dog. He's amazing." Just through simple touches, Riggs is bridging cultural barriers.

Recalling the uncertainty of making a Facility Dog Program a reality, Krista says of bringing Riggs on board, "He's really taught me to think about what is possible." These two women know that having this beautiful black Lab with them is only possible because of the people who put time, love, and patience into raising him. Annika says, "He just exudes all of the love that has clearly gone into him." "I hope they know that he is doing amazing work and that he is going to help the lives of so, so many patients," adds Krista.

As the father of the boy who had the panic attack shared with Annika, "Riggs falls somewhere between the medical and the magical."



Watch Riggs in action in a video that Children's Hospital MN made. Scan the QR code or visit can-do.link/riggs.

You can make more possibilities realities by visiting candocanines.org/donate or by using the enclosed envelope to make a gift.

Cooperation leads to healthy dogs

It's no secret; Arnold is a stud! Literally, he serves as one of our stud breeding dogs, and he is known for showing up for his breeding dates wearing a bow tie. He's there to impress the lady and sweep her off her paws.



Our breeding program is more than just the birds and the bees between dogs, though. It's about cooperation. As an Assistance Dog International accredited member, Can Do Canines is invited to participate in the International Breeding Cooperative

(IBC). We have been a part of this coop since its inception in 2013, and currently are one of 54 international members.

Director of Training Julianne Larsen says that being part of IBC is "a way for us all to work together to increase genetic diversity, allowing much better chances of having healthy dogs." She explains, "We want an inbreeding coefficient that is as low as possible to reduce risks of different kinds of illnesses that are recessive."

As a member, this means that we not only are able to accept a dog from another organization when we are at the top of the queue, but we also share puppies each year with our fellow IBC organizations. During our thorough and regular evaluations of our dogs, beginning when they are seven weeks old, dogs selected to be part of the coop have received high rankings for structure, temperament, and other essential qualities.

Additionally, our stud dogs, like Arnold, may participate by having semen from them flown to a waiting female dog. While Arnold can't charm her with his good looks, perhaps he somehow knows that this role in this online dating exercise is equally important.

After all, doing everything to ensure healthy dogs puts a bow on raising the best possible assistance dogs for those who need them.

Hoseks find process with FreeWill meaningful

Roy and Paula Hosek have been Can Do Canines supporters for over twenty years, following the organization through a couple of location moves. “We’re dog wired,” says Roy, who certified with Hearing Assist Dog Wrigley, an owner-provided Boykin Spaniel in 2022. Recently retired, Roy has represented Can Do Canines at a number of events, often with the popular Wrigley. The organization has plans for both Paula and Roy to be even more involved in the near future.

“When it comes to supporting charities, I need to be confident that our donations will be used to maximum benefit,” shares Roy. “I look at annual reports. I talk to people. I am careful to give money to organizations who will use it right.” He is convinced money donated to Can Do Canines is well spent. “The organization is very efficiently run, with a relatively small but dedicated staff and many great volunteers. When you see the graduating teams, you realize that not many people or organizations can do what they do. And it is obvious that there are way more people out there in need of these wonderful dogs. That is why Can Do Canines is at the top of our preferred charities list.”

The Hoseks have long had a traditional will, but that did not prevent the free will-writing partner of Can Do Canines—FreeWill—from catching their attention. Though somewhat skeptical at the start, they went through the process of creating a will on the site. “It was a fruitful exercise,” shares Roy, “especially because our existing will had not been updated for a number of years. There were even several charities included that no longer exist!” The couple appreciates how easily future updates will be to make to their FreeWill document.

Benefits to becoming part of the Can Do Canines “Legacy Club” like the Hoseks may include income or estate tax deductions and elimination of capital gains taxes on appreciated assets. Most importantly, there is the knowledge that your charitable planning will help perpetuate—beyond your lifetime—a mission of providing assistance dogs, free of charge, to people with disabilities.



Roy and Paula Hosek with Hearing Assist Dog Wrigley.

Or as Roy says to encourage others to try FreeWill and opt to support Can Do Canines when doing so, “You know you’re going to be doing some good.”

FREEWILL 

If you would like to use the FreeWill service to make your free will, visit the “More Ways to Give” page on our website or contact Janet Cobus, [jacobus@candocanines.org](mailto:jcobus@candocanines.org), for assistance.

More dogs-in-training attending college this semester



This fall, while some of our dogs have become Gophers, others are now Falcons. Our FETCH (Fostering Education Through Campus Hosting) Program has expanded from the University of Minnesota to the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. Ten Can Do Canines, ages 9-18 months, crossed the border to be paired with 22 students for the fall semester.

Dr. Chris Hergenrader, Assistant Professor of Animal Science at UW-River Falls, oversees the program for the university. Chris stated, “We want to provide a hands-on experiential learning opportunity for students in a way that helps them, the dogs, and the greater community.”

The dogs and students are living together in dorm rooms and attending group training sessions with Can Do Canines Lead Trainer Emily Hedenland. The program at UW-River Falls also involves courses focused on service dog training, with a curriculum aligning with professional dog training certification. Although many student handlers are animal science majors, this is not a requirement.

What is a requirement is a love for dogs, which is certainly being reciprocated.

Volunteer Advisory Committee provides valuable input

In recent months, our Puppy Program has adopted new terminology for the volunteer positions to simplify language and distinguish our vocabulary from that of rescue organizations (for example, “host” versus “foster”). The program has also formed groups called Puppy Packs and has plans to host a conference for Puppy Program volunteers in the coming months.

The impetus behind these changes is largely due to the Puppy Program Volunteer Advisory Committee, launched in January 2022. The dedicated crew, which currently consists of Katie Cormier, Andrea Weinreb, and Mike Zeckmeister, is tasked to improve volunteer engagement and enhance communications by providing opinions, recommendations, and evaluations to Puppy Program Staff. Training Manager Shenna Lemche, who coordinates the group, says, “They have really been a helpful sounding board,” emphasizing that each member brings different experiences to the table. “We’ve made adjustments based on their honest feedback.”

As a result of their quarterly virtual meetings, in which Volunteer Coordinator Christine Popp also participates,

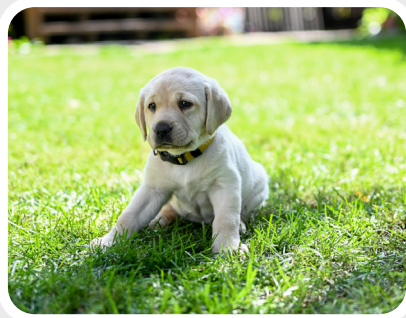
the group has offered input for the structure at our graduations, the volunteer onboarding process, volunteer engagement ideas, and more.

Committee members are asked to serve a minimum of two years, and new applications are being accepted now at puppyprogram@candocanines.org. The position description notes that members should have been active as a Puppy Program volunteer for at least a year and been a Raiser within the past year, among other requirements. During orientation, they review the organization’s strategic plan, along with various standards, procedures, and content.

Our Client Services Team is also in the process of forming a similar committee for providing feedback on that department’s policies and practices.

Thinking of the volunteer committee, Shenna jokes, “They don’t always agree with me on everything!” However, she states of having this advisory group, “I’m very happy with it! It has enhanced our program a lot. I can’t imagine not having them now.”

Thank you for making these “E” litter puppies possible!



UPCOMING EVENTS

More information on our website: candocanines.org/events

Open House, November 11

If you or someone you know might want to learn more about us, check out our open house being held at our New Hope campus on Saturday, November 11, from noon–2 p.m.

Give to the Max Day, November 16

Support Can Do Canines for Give to the Max Day 2023! Watch for more exciting details soon, including a chance to name a puppy if you donate at least \$100.



Our Mission

Can Do Canines is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for people with disabilities by creating mutually beneficial partnerships with specially trained dogs.

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Facility Dog Riggs' photo credit: Star Studio
Arnold's photo credit: Lynne Kaufmann
Puppy photos on the back cover: Harlow McPherson