

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

ITA member and board representative **Eileen Ambrose** spends much of the winter up in Sun Valley, Idaho, where she and her partner, **Kevin**, spend a lot of time supporting veterans and others who come for skiing exercise and rehabilitation opportunities. Here are some more shots of their activities there.

RIGHT: Kevin encourages a boy who is about to take off on a sled as part of the Higher Ground program. Eileen says, “Kevin was really busy the last three days encouraging the kids at the Kids Paralympic Camp; not to forget the instructors, the ski school, the ski patrol, the mountain staff and the local and vacationing public. Such an eye opening experience; tugs at the heartstrings.”

BELOW: “This week we are participating in a First Responder Camp. Today was sled hockey day. Always lots of fun for the participants. Sadly, one of them fell backwards on the ice and hit his head.

“Kevie was incredible. He and I were in the bleachers, up above, and he was very observant and concerned about what was happening. He was such a good boy; didn’t make a sound while they were taking care of one of their own and then when the paramedics came. Thank goodness, the guy is doing good.



“Later some of the participants came to get comfort from Kevin and give some to him. My heart and soul were so touched.”



PARTNER LEAVING EARTH



Bandit, partner of Mary Jane Ryan

(Helena, MT)

“An Animal’s eyes have the power to speak a great language.”

Bandit 2009-12/21/2024

Mary Jane Says, “Our beautiful Bandit came into our lives in 2010 after being rescued from an abusive situation. If any dog had a reason to distrust humans it was Bandit, but instead the love just poured out of him when he came to us. He knew with us no one would ever harm him again.

“Bandit stole the hearts of everyone who met him, and he spent his life helping others. Bandit became registered with ITA in March of 2014. He loved his many years of visits with ITA at Shodair Children’s Hospital, especially when his good friends Whiskey Rose and Diane Tipton joined the team in 2015. Bandit also enjoyed working at Shodair with Cathy Kendall and her wonderful Australian Shepherd Alice. Bandit loved visiting Bryant and Broadwater elementary schools for many years as a R.E.A.D dog and loved retirement facilities.



“Bandit received his AKC Distinguished Therapy Dog vest patch in 10/2018 for 400 visits and continued visitng up until retirement. Bandit and I retired in 10/23. He was a very busy Aussie (almost 16 years old in 2024). We both loved every minute of our time with ITA.

“Our hearts are broken but we know we will see Bandit again one day.”



Therapy Dog Visits—Know and Watch for Your Dog's Signals

(ED. NOTE: Lori Gates has been an ITA handler for more than 15 years (since November of 2009.)

Visits can be very stressful for a therapy dog, even one that loves petting and people. All visit times should be about an hour, but for younger dogs and dogs new to therapy work, even less is appropriate. A more seasoned therapy dog may be able to work somewhat longer, but not much. A new therapy dog should start off with only one or two people petting them at a time. Explain to people that the dog is new and still learning; they will understand. This is how I started off all my therapy dogs, and eventually it didn't matter to them how many people were surrounding them. My dogs all knew that if they needed to leave the situation, I would allow them to leave.

Start your day off with an assessment of your dog. Is your dog happy and ready to go to work? If your dog is having an off day, maybe not feeling 100%, consider skipping your visit. This is volunteer work for both you and your dog. It should be a fun and positive experience for your dog so that he/she wants to continue working.

I currently have two therapy dogs who have been doing therapy work since they were old enough to start. They are now both senior dogs. One of my dogs is still extremely active, but they both go crazy and chase after squirrels, chipmunks, rabbits, rats, etc. whether they are in our backyard or up in the mountains. I can't stop them. When Grizzly was six years old, he visited a patient who was in a lot of

pain. The patient was crying and groaning non-stop, also holding on to the area on their body that was in pain. I asked if this patient wanted a visit, and the patient said "yes."

Grizzly climbed into the bed, and the patient proceeded to pet Grizzly continuously for about 15-20 minutes, while still crying and groaning. Grizzly never tried to get off the bed while we were there, but eventually I said it was time for us to leave. We went home after that. When Grizzly got home, he curled up in his bed and didn't move. Two hours later, when a squirrel was in our backyard and my other dog started barking to get out and chase the squirrel, Grizzly didn't move. This was a first! I had never seen Grizzly act that way before. This told me how much that last patient took out of Grizzly. Another two hours later he wasn't much better. He was fine the next day.

A couple of weeks later Grizzly saw the same patient again, remembered him and had no hesitation about visiting with him. However, this time he didn't appear to be in the same amount of pain as before.

Visits can be overwhelming for some dogs. I

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Lori & Grizzly



Therapy Dog Visits (cont.)

personally don't like crowded facilities—places like, for example, malls or cruise ships. I become overwhelmed and sometimes need to quickly leave the area. Our dogs may have the same feelings. So, watch your dog closely to see how it is handling the situation today. Every day, even at the same facility, may be different. You may visit a place where you may smell nothing of note, but your dog may detect a smell it doesn't like. For example, my dog Bear does not like the smell from patients who have had recent chemotherapy, and he will pull me out of the room almost immediately. I no longer visit recent chemotherapy patients with Bear. If a nurse asks me to visit a particular room, I always ask when the last treatment was. If it has been recent, I decline. The nursing staff understands.

Another example, my first therapy dog visited the Burn Unit for months and then one day started dragging me out as soon as I entered the unit. I tried bringing him in a couple more times on different days with the same result. We quit visiting the Burn Unit but continued visiting everywhere else.

You need to know your dog and watch him

carefully. S/he will tell you when they are not comfortable. It might be a look, restlessness, looking for the exit or pulling you away, licking or yawning, avoiding people. There are many different signs that tell you that they are done, or not happy with the situation. When that happens, depending on the circumstances, I remove them completely and don't go back, politely explaining that we have enjoyed the visit, and it is time to visit with others. Or sometimes your dog just needs a break, and I remove them temporarily before bringing them back. They may need to go outside to relieve themselves. Other times, especially if young kids are involved or individuals with disabilities, your dog may not like the way they are being petted. You need to speak up, explain and demonstrate to them how your dog likes to be petted. Then, if that doesn't work you need to politely step away explaining that you've enjoyed the visit, and you need to visit with other people.

You must be an advocate for your dog.

– Lori Gates

They told me my house smelled like dogs, and I asked them, "Do you know what a dog smells like? It smells like gratitude, loyalty, nobility, affection, pure unconditional love. And in spite of all they've been through, they smell no resentment." So blessed that my house smells like dogs.

– Patrick Swayze



Dogs in Paintings



Dog Park, by Jane Troup



Lily, ITA Partner of Nancy Rosen, by a friend



LEFT: Celebrating Diversity, by Daniel Patrick Kessler
RIGHT: Little Pup, by Michelle Rivera



The Lighter Side

