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Features

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PYMATUNING TOWNSHIP

With dogged devotion

Woman teaches prisoners to train canine partners

By Jeff Greenburg
Herald Staff Writer

It might seem a bit unusual to the average person to hear the words puppy and prison used in the same sentence.

Not for Roberta Knauf. Mrs. Knauf, 56, of Pymatuning Township, has been working for several years with inmates at three state prisons, instructing female inmates to train service dogs that will be eventually be used by disabled citizens.

Mrs. Knauf has been affiliated with Canine Partners for Life's prison puppies program since 2001 and has no plans of slowing down what has become a very rewarding experience. As a result of her dedication, Mrs. Knauf was recently honored by the state Department of Corrections as one of its volunteers of the year for 2006.

The state lockup at Cambridge Springs in Crawford County was the first in the state to have the program, she said. Then prison Superintendent Marie Brooks, who is now at Albion in Erie County, wanted it to be an enrichment program for inmates.

"She wanted it to be an incentive and rewards program for people who are serving long-term sentences," Mrs. Knauf said this week. "It makes their time a little more valuable," she added. "They have something to get up every morning for."

When the program started, critics wondered if it was appropriate to have dogs in a prison. The answer, Mrs. Knauf said, has been a resounding yes, a "win-win situation" for everyone.

One of the reasons Canine Partners, which is based near

The program offers benefits for inmates, who get to learn a skill and are typically better behaved, as well as raising the morale of the entire institution. It also gives inmates pride, Mrs. Knauf said, "because they know they are doing something worthwhile" and it "really gives them a sense that they can be a part of society."

Philadelphia, began looking at initiating its programs in a prison was because service dog organizations were having difficulty finding people who could commit the time and money to raise a puppy for a year.

"People's lives are so busy," Mrs. Knauf said. "Plus the cost is about \$2,000 a year, including food, supplies and veterinary care."

By utilizing inmates, she said the organization isn't putting a financial burden on people. In addition, the dogs are getting a lot more training because it's "24/7."

Training outside a prison can be spotty, for example, because people might not be able to take dogs to work. In prison, the dogs are with their handlers at all times.

Mrs. Knauf, the general manager at John Flynn Pet Funeral Home and Crematory in Hermitage, said organizations also learned other states were doing it and "were seeing when they got the dogs back in a year they were phe-



Jason Kapusta/Herald

Among the registered therapy dogs Roberta Knauf works with is her own, a female Labrador-golden retriever mix named Nika.

nomenal and ready to be placed with a recipient."

The result was cutting down the time to place dogs, which she said allows more dogs to be placed "and that's the ultimate goal."

The program also benefits inmates, who get to learn a skill and are typically better behaved. It also raises morale in the entire institution, she said.

It gives inmates pride, she continued, "because they know they are doing something worthwhile" and it "really gives them a sense that they can be a part of society."

Most of the dogs are donated to the program and Canine Partners averages "20 to 30" graduates a year.

"We work very hard to leave no gaps so when one group of puppies leaves, another group arrives," she said.

Mrs. Knauf currently focuses her efforts at the Cambridge Springs and Albion prisons. She previously over-

saw a similar program at the prison at Muncy near Williamsport, but that program is no longer operating.

Typically, there are four or five dogs in a prison. The puppies, usually labradors, poodles or "mystery dogs," arrive at 8 weeks old and stay until their first birthday. Two inmates are assigned to each dog, a primary handler and a secondary handler, and that dog remains with the inmate 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

When that year is up, the dogs go primarily to people with "mobility impairments," she said. People, for example, with multiple-sclerosis, spina bifida or spinal cord injuries are ideal candidates for one of the dogs, she said.

"We are also one of the pioneers for seizure alert dogs that can actually detect when someone is going to have a seizure," Mrs. Knauf said.

The organization is also starting to expand its services

to people with diabetes and autistic children.

"It's amazing when you see these dogs, what they can do for these people," she said.

Among those amazing things are opening doors, paying a cashier, pushing elevator buttons, and tugging open drawers and refrigerators.

"We can actually teach them so they know the difference between a milk jug and an orange juice jug," Mrs. Knauf said.

Although recipients don't have to pay for the dog, there are some costs. The special harnesses the dogs wear cost \$1,200 and Canine Partners likes to recoup \$900 of that. But the nonprofit organization helps recipients to help offset that cost any way it can, including assisting with fundraisers.

The only other cost is for housing that's required for a 22-day intensive final "team training" at Canine Partner's headquarters.



Jason Kapusta/Herald

Roberta Knauf holds a photo of a service dog that was being trained as part of the prison puppy program.

Discontinued dinnerware's value found at Replacements Ltd.

Dear Helaine and Joe: I would like to know if the china I have had for 64 years is valuable. I have a service for 12 and all the extra pieces, including the coffee pot, gravy boat, creamer and sugar, and salt- and pepper shakers. The pattern is "California Ivy" by Metlox. Thank you. — L. R., Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear L. R.: Metlox was founded in 1927 as the Metlox Manufacturing Co., and its principal products were outdoor ceramic signs that could be fitted with neon tubing. It specialized in making theater marquees, including the one for the famous Pantages Theater in Hollywood, Calif.

The company was started by T.C. Prouty and his son, Willis. They had factories in Manhattan Beach and another in Hermosa Beach, Calif. that made architectural tiles from Death Valley talc.

When T.C. died in 1931, his son decided to take the company in a different direction by focusing on the manufacture of dinnerware. The first pattern was called "California Pottery," and the "Poppytrail" line (named after the California state flower) first appeared in 1934.

World War II curtailed the production of dinnerware and the company made aircraft parts, shell casings, and nuts and bolts. After the war, Prouty tried making toys, but had to sell the company to Evan K. Shaw in 1946, whose American Pottery factory had burned down.

Shaw was interested in reinstating the making of dinnerware on a grand scale.

The first line was "California Ivy" and it was introduced in 1946. This new line was marketed under the old "Poppytrail" line name. "California Ivy" was a big success, and in the company's brochure, comedian Gracie Allen is shown at home with her "California Ivy" dinnerware.

For insurance replacement purposes, we checked with Replacements.com and found that a five-piece place setting was available for approximately \$54. A single dinner plate (10½-inch diameter) is priced at \$20 while a luncheon plate (9½-inch diameter) is \$15, while a salad plate (8-inch diameter) is valued at \$20.

The gravy boat with its underplate is \$20. However, a wall pocket based on the gravy boat form is valued at about \$100. The teapot is \$150, but the larger and somewhat more common coffee pot is a bit less at \$110. Hard to find pieces include the mug (\$70), the six-piece lazy Susan with its original metal frame (\$700), and the egg cup (\$50).

Metlox's "California Ivy" went out of production in 1984, and the company went out of business in 1989.

Helaine Fendelman and Joe Rosson are the authors of the "Price It Yourself" (HarperResource, \$19.95).

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The pattern name for this dinnerware is "California Ivy." It was made by Metlox under its "Poppytrail" trade name.

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