



*If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one lonely person
into happiness again,
I shall not live in vain.
Emily Dickinson*

GSDCM Therapy Dogs

The German shepherd dog has long been known and admired for its versatility and intelligence in many working capacities such as Police Service, guide leaders for the blind and Search and Rescue. But the German shepherd has also been found to excel at another admirable job, Therapy Dog.

The German shepherd's keen sensibility and innate compassion finds it an ideal breed for service in Therapy work. Even the most active and robust of dogs can have an uncanny sense of gentleness for the frail and elderly or special needs children.



German shepherds can be found performing Therapy duties all over the world. During the tragedy in New York on 9/11 not only were German shepherds an integral part of the rescue and recovery work in the ruins of the World Trade Centre, many German shepherd Therapy Dogs helped to comfort rescue and relief personnel, firefighters and police officers, and families who had lost loved ones. To hug a dog and share a moment of tears or a special secret can be a huge help to those in grief or turmoil, and a German shepherd can do that like no other with strength, silent acceptance and unconditional love.

German shepherd Therapy Dogs who worked along side the rescue and relief efforts at the World Trade Centre and at other disasters like Hurricane Katrina are usually a part of an organization devoted to the certification, promotion and placement of Therapy Dog teams in areas and facilities where they are needed. Therapy Dogs International and The Delta Society, both in the U.S. are two well known associations, and the St. John Ambulance in Canada has Therapy Dog programs in place in every province.

St. John Ambulance recognizes that many people spend time isolated from their families, often in hospitals, senior's residences or nursing homes. It was a natural extension for St. John Ambulance to look for a way to care for these people. The Therapy Dog program was started in Peterborough, Ontario in 1992 with 8 dogs, and today there are thousands of volunteer Therapy Dog teams certified in Canada. In Manitoba, St. John has over 225 teams bringing joy and comfort to those in need, and some of those very special dogs and owners are our own Club members.

GSDCM member Christine Kaskiw is the St. John Ambulance Manitoba Coordinator - Volunteer Services Provincial Evaluator. Chris joined the St. John Ambulance 2 1/2 years ago, and her dogs Xena, Yazy and Max have all been part of her Therapy "team". Max worked in the SJA-TD Special Paws for Special Kids Autism Program.



*Christine with Xena vom Canisphere CD, TT, HIC, SJATD (left down)
Maximus vom Canisphere- SJATD "Special Paws for Special Kids
Autism" dog (right down) and Ch. Yazy vom Canisphere HIC, SJATD*

"I don't believe there is a more beautiful sight than a male patriarch or an elegant and tender female caring for their people. The majestic calmness of a well tempered working German shepherd is phenomenal and without a doubt the GSD's I have seen while working at St. John Ambulance have been exceptional" says Christine.

Her own son Andrew, who is autistic, has had profound benefits from living with a special German shepherd, Max. When Andrew was 9 a friend passed on an article to Christine which described the positive impact a dog can make with a special needs child, so Max joined their family. Since then, Andrew has improved in leaps and bounds, developing better verbal and social skills and even volunteering at St. John Ambulance and becoming a Cadet. Last year as a result of his hard efforts (and Max's work) with GSD's, Andrew received the Bronze Level "Duke of Edinburgh Award" that celebrates young peoples' skills in an activity (his was GSD's), sports and volunteering. Christine and her husband Vince are very proud and grateful for the impact of the special German shepherds in Andrew's life.

Christine manages all the volunteer Therapy Dog teams in Manitoba, as well as 120 Adult and Youth Cadet First Aid Volunteers. With Therapy Dog in particular she develops and implements new programs that have included the Special Paws for Special Kids Autism Program, the Federal Penitentiary Therapy dog program at Stony Mountain Institution, and currently a pilot program: St. John Ambulance Manitoba - Age and Opportunity "Paws with a Cause", matching Therapy Dog Teams with seniors isolated in their homes in Winnipeg. Chris oversees the screening and training of new teams, and coordinates placements with community agencies as well as public speaking about the Therapy Dog services.

Chris is currently working with her young dog Regatta's Andreas, who is in training for the SJATD Special Paws for Special Kids Autism Program, and for Andrew. Bert, now 16 months, is being trained at the St. Amant Centre through a special agreement to officially work (volunteer) on a regular basis through St. John Ambulance.



At St. Amant Bert helps some children walk, or if in walkers walks slowly with them. For children that are non-verbal and use a push button that is programmed to speak, Bert swats it with his paw to start conversation with them and does "high fives" for verbalization. For children in physio therapy he lies down on

the physio mat while they relax next to him, petting him. In the summer he'll be out in a harness with the more mobile and he also visits during music therapy and lays on the mat while the kids scream and sing. Bert helps them turn off lights and is a vacuum for dropped food.

Christine has personally experienced the value of the Therapy Dog program, in the joy and hope that it brings a senior or a child. There is nothing which compares to that kind of bond.

GSDCM member Debra Robertson and her dog Cedar are a very busy team. Debra is also a Provincial Evaluator with the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog program. Cedar is the demo dog at the orientation meetings for potential new volunteers, as well as being a PR dog at public demonstrations, booths or other activities requiring Therapy Dog representation. Debra felt that Cedar would make a good Therapy Dog because she is highly workable, kind and level-headed and she was quite right!



Debra with HIT O.T.CH, CH Only Cedar Vom Canisphere UD, HIC, TT, CDI, CGN, SJATD

At the urging of Christine and because of her extensive training background, Debra became involved as an evaluator in the Therapy Dog program in 2005 and has found it to be a fun and satisfying activity. Seeing people interact with the dogs, visiting with shut-ins and observing some wonderful animal-human connection has proven to be a very rewarding experience.

St. John Ambulance belongs to the Order of Canada and has a private committee separate from staff and volunteers that nominate individuals for work within their charity. The first nomination is called a "Priory Vote of Thanks - for valuable assistance rendered to further the objectives of St. John Ambulance and the Order of St. John Priory of Canada", reviewed and signed by the Governor General of Canada and awarded locally by the Lt. Governor of Manitoba at his home. Debra and Christine were each honoured with this prestigious award on May 30, 2006



Club Life member Jill Dickin had always enjoyed the visits with seniors at the Middlechurch Home and Oakview Place when the GSDCM Drill Team of the 1980's would stop in to perform. Jill also used to take her first German shepherd Wizard along when she visited her grandmother at Middlechurch, so when Cody was 3 and had a good training foundation she joined the St. John program to share another German shepherd with seniors.



Jill with Central Region BIM, CH Camdn's Cobra V Regatta TT, HIC, GCG, SJATD (retired)

Cody was the first Club German shepherd to enter the Therapy Dog program, earning his certificate on May 15, 1999. His soundness and character are ideal attributes for a German shepherd, and especially a Therapy Dog.

Cody loves kids, and proved to be a natural with the elderly and frail, visiting the extended care wing of Lion's Manor downtown for 2 years. For a dog with such strength and presence, he was acutely aware of himself in their space, never once bumping a chair or cane even in a crowded hallway and would take his treats without touching a hand. During his visits he would always have a grin and a tail wag for everyone, and in spite of his size and formidable appearance, this gentle giant was very much loved and doted on by the patients, their families and the nursing staff. Residents who hadn't spoken in years would speak to Cody, and those who lived in a blank world far removed from ours would smile and have a light in their eyes when he entered a room. His job, well done.



Susanne Olver, long time GSDCM Life member and her dog Dynasty deserve a very special mention in our group of Therapy Teams. Susanne, who is now 80 years young and Dynasty, 9, make their weekly visits to The Convalescent Home of Winnipeg. They have been Therapy Dog program members since 2005.

Susanne says "German shepherds have definitely kept me young and active - no question about it!"

"Dynasty has been a mother to 4 litters and has proven to be a true German shepherd, excelling in conformation and obedience in both the Canadian and German rings. Now her most important job besides being my beloved pet is that she works as a St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog." Dynasty was featured for her Therapy work in the Winter 05/06 issue of the German Shepherd Quartley magazine.

Most people the Team sees are old and disoriented, not remembering Dynasty's name or her last visit. But every time they go, old faces break into big smiles and cries of "Isn't she beautiful!" are heard all around the home.



"V" Ch Dynasty V Haus Jalmark SchH2 KK1a (life) CDX SJATD and Susanne

"One particular friend is a gentleman, not that old, with advanced Parkinson's disease. I have to guide his hand to Dynasty's head and he makes apologies for not be able to pet her properly. She just sits patiently as he touches the warmth of her fur. His thanks are one of the most touching experiences of our visits - just now but perhaps for not that long."



"Finally, there was another dear friend who's greatest concern was that she had nothing to give Dynasty (I always had a cookie for her) and at the end of each visit she would kiss my hand and thank me for bringing my dog. May she rest in peace".

Thank you, Susanne and Dynasty, for bringing joy and happiness to these people.



Canisphere's G Nikita CD, TT, CGN, HCT SJATD, Debbie, Jur Haus' Taner CD, TT, CGN, HCT, SJATD

GSDCM Club member Debbie Hinds, our current Vice President, wanted to be involved in the Therapy Dog program because she enjoys her dogs so much and wanted to share the joy with other people who may not be in the position to have a dog. Taner and Nikki were tested in April of 2005, and began visiting at Concordia Place, where they still drop in each week.

"Taner has a good temperament and enjoys strutting her stuff, while Niki is just crazy about people and I knew that she would love to visit and be spoiled by them. They both enjoy the attention with pats and treats" says Debbie.

"People are so very happy and excited to see Taner and Niki when we go for our visits. Eyes light up, people who don't seem to function well socially enjoy talking to the girls, and they enjoy giving the dogs treats. Doing some silly dog tricks and obedience moves also seem to put a smile or two on patients faces. But I personally think that the most interesting thing I have found doing visits with my dogs is that I am blessed even more, because seeing people happy and enjoying the dogs is overwhelming at times. It is a time in my life that is set aside to help others."

Treasurer Donna Cameron, Life GSDCM member, and her dog Zydo are recent graduates of the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog program. Donna and Zydo were accepted this past October and have already made many friends at the Boyne Lodge in Carman, Manitoba where Donna also works. It seemed a natural progression to be able to visit with those she cares for in her job, and help them in another very special way.

"I wanted to become involved in the Therapy Dog program because I know the joy animals bring to me. I feel so sorry for these people who may have had to give up a beloved pet when their health failed or when they moved in to the Lodge. Their world becomes very small, and anything we can do to bring life into their day is great. I love to see the faces light up and grin when we go into a room."



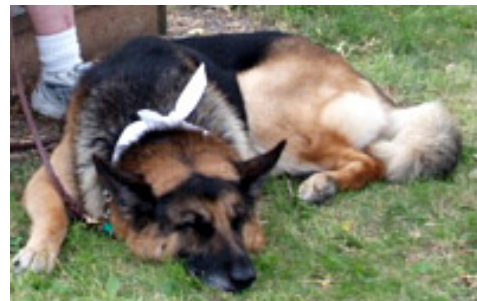
CH Kilmarvdon Azydeco Kijoda CD TT HIC SJATD and Donna

Donna thought Zydo would make an excellent Therapy Dog because he was always calm and steady in noisy and busy situations, from his many years as a show dog. Zydo also has a good obedience foundation, and is more than happy to put his paws up on a lap tray so the people can pet him.



London gets some petting

Cody grabs a few winks after a long day with the kids





Deb & CH Penhall's Bridge of Gold GCG, SJATD

Current GSDCM Club President Deborah Ross and London recently entered the Therapy Dog program this past October, and visit in Steinbach at Bethesda Place Personal Care Home. "I thought it would be good to help somehow in our community. I really like meeting people and if I can make someone's day a little bit brighter, that's great! Being able to do it with my dog is a blessing and the St John's Ambulance Therapy Dog program has made this possible.

Deborah loves seeing how excited some of the elderly people get when they see London. She had an experience with a resident that usually did not say very much. One morning the resident was talking with them for about ten minutes. "I just feel so good inside when I have made an elderly person smile. Just adding something to their day that they can look forward to makes it all worth while"

London is a beautifully natured dog that is willing to please and he is very obedient and good with people. Deborah says he must be enjoying it too because he is always hoping he can come along whenever she leaves to go somewhere. "I find this is wonderful way for me to spend time with London and people. In a nutshell myself, London and residents all benefit from the visits."



"Dogs are not our whole lives, but they make our lives whole."

~ Roger Carras

No words could be more true when it comes to spending one's life with a dog or two. We, as fanciers of this marvelous breed certainly know and understand how important they are in our lives - how often have we sat quietly with our dogs and just appreciated their presence? But there are so many others who long for the touch of a cold nose or a soft nuzzle of their arm.

Sharing this special relationship with people who cannot live their lives with a dog is far more beneficial than one may realize. Dogs keep us, as owners, healthy, busy and active. They provide us with entertainment and fun, and fulfill our need for competition and accomplishment. But just petting or stroking a dog can lower blood pressure and has a significant calming effect on people, as well as improving motor skills in those who are physically challenged or who might suffer from arthritis or injuries. Seniors may share stories or recollect happy events they have had with their own dogs, increasing their sense of well being and offering them opportunity to chat and become more interactive. Dogs trained to assist with physiotherapy provide motivation for patients to exercise, and there are also children's programs where dogs sit with a child who has difficulty with speech and reading, showing them only approval and a tail wag. Therapy Dogs bring dignity to those who receive their services that transcends any human ability to nurture and heal a person who is discouraged, lonely or hurt.

The special dogs in the GSDC of Manitoba who have performed these duties, and who continue to brighten peoples' days are to be commended. Not only have most of these dogs attained Championships, they also have other training titles or involvement in dog sports or activities, making them well rounded examples of our breed and excellent representatives of the German Shepherd Dog Club of Manitoba. Congratulations and bravo to each and every team.

Jill Dickin

