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OPTIONS

Pit bull helps children learn to read

By Mary Forney, Staff Writer



Rowdy, a 14-year-old pit bull, is helping children learn to read at Ward Elementary School in Downey.

DOWNEY— Ward Elementary School has a new teacher's aide this year – and she has four legs and fur.

Rowdy is a 14-year-old pit bull that has been helping children with reading difficulties read.

"We love Rowdy and this has been amazing for the kids," said Ward Elementary School Principal Jennifer Robbins.

The children take turns reading to Rowdy who simply listens and laps up the attention.

"This doesn't help the children learn reading strategies, but it does help them with their confidence. They are taking more risks trying out new words because they like reading to Rowdy," Robbins said.

When Rowdy was a puppy, she was found wandering in an industrial parking lot. Her owner Linda Bates admits she was reluctant to take Rowdy home, but her husband asked her to give the dog a trial run.

Naming her "Rowdy" because she was rambunctious, Bates enrolled her in the Downey Obedience Club where she earned the Companion Dog Excellent title, Canine Good Citizen award, and passed the temperament test requirements to become a therapy dog.

In 1997, Rowdy started visiting children at Norwalk's psychiatric Metropolitan State Hospital.

"The children responded positively to her. They would play fetch with her, get her water, shake her hand, pet her, and confide in Rowdy," Bates said.

"Metro can be a depressing place so Rowdy's visits gave the children something to look forward to."

After realizing that the Metropolitan State Hospital didn't have books for the children to read, Bates took the problem to Noreen Edge, who is another Downey Dog Obedience Club member. Edge helped Bates write a grant proposal for \$5,000 from the State of California.

With the receipt of the grant funds and donations of more than 4,000 books from family and friends from the dog community, Bates was able to create "Rowdy's Reading Room" at the hospital in 2002.

Bates and Rowdy have received numerous therapy work awards which include: the 1999 Delta Society Beyond Limits Special Service Award, 1999 and 2002 Metropolitan State Hospital Outstanding Volunteers Awards, 2002 and 2003 American Kennel Club Award for Canine Excellence, and 2007 AKC Ace Honorable Mention.

Bates was also awarded Woman of the Year in 2003 by the 38th Congressional District for her therapy work

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with Rowdy.

"There is something about the touch of a dog that people relate to – it's usually a happy and calming experience," Bates said.

"It also brings out a responsible side in kids."

Rowdy may be retiring in the spring of 2009 because she has arthritis. Bates, who is now a therapy dog evaluator with Therapy Dogs International, is seeking anyone interested in doing therapy work with their dog.

According to the founder of Therapy Dogs International Elaine Smith, "All therapy dogs have one thing in common. Their owners have...the unselfish desire to help others, taking time to paws awhile for love."

For more information, e-mail Linda.tdi@earthlink.net.

Discuss this Article

Pawz writes:

December 7, 2008 at 7:47 AM

Great story.
Thank you for doing a positive story.
There are many of these dogs in Therapy work.
At least one of the dogs abused by Michael Vick is a certified Therapy dog.

You can read his story here
<http://ourpack.org/leo.html>

And here are a lot more with titles
(ATTS,TD,CGC)
http://www.badrap.org/rescue/hall_of_fame.cfm

Rachel Muller writes:

December 7, 2008 at 2:54 PM

As a Kindergarten teacher, I loved this story. As the grandmother of an adopted shelter dog pit bull, Mia, I double loved this story!

Bonnie writes:

December 8, 2008 at 8:31 AM

love the story, my 7 year old pitt is a love and my 4 year olds best buddy.

Submit a Comment

Name:

Comment:

Answer a simple question

What is the color of an orange?

Obituaries

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- [James Semponis was WWII veteran](#)
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Eric Pierce's Blog

From the editor of The Downey Patriot newspaper

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