



An Anaheim, Calif., restaurant attempted to break the world record for making the **largest bowl of spaghetti**. Buca di Beppo successfully filled a giant bowl with 13,786 pounds of spaghetti and more than 100 gallons of marinara sauce on March 12. The previous world record was 9,767 pounds of pasta.

— Buca di Beppo Italian Restaurant



SERVICE DOGS

must pass a rigorous two-year training program before being assigned to assist disabled people with household tasks.



Photos by SAM DEAN | The Roanoke Times

Midas and Connie Kniseley train with a wheelchair in downtown Roanoke. Negotiating a wheelchair around town has given Kniseley a profound respect for those who must do it every day. Top: Before Midas can be paired with a disabled partner, he must be trained to retrieve objects, such as keys.

TUESDAY

Pencil Day

Check out this page to learn all about the popular writing tool.



INSIDE

Ben Beagle

Bennie's not going to let an insurance company push him around.

Page 3

John Rosemond

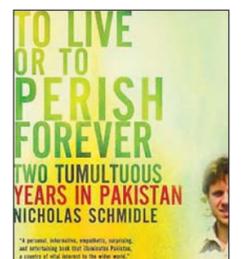
Husband thinks his wife is doting too much on their 3-year-old son.

Page 3

Books

Books & Talks Calendar and New & Noteworthy Paperbacks.

Page 8



CORNERSHOT

Let me just say right off that I love the Girl Scouts. I washed out of Boy Scouts — never mind why — but the girls always seemed to have a better thing going, without the quasi-military edge.

And they're just so darned cute. Which is why this time of year it pains me to see them at the doors of certain business establishments doing what they do so very well: selling cookies.

You see, Girl Scout cookies are not good for me. Yes, I know they've cut down on the trans fat and no doubt they are as healthy as cookies can be expected to be.

But as even the Girl Scouts' own Web site points out: "It is important to remember that Girl Scout Cookies are a snack food and are meant to be consumed in limited quantities within the context of a balanced diet."

Right. Now, I know the appeal of Girl Scout cookies. I speak, in fact, as a recovering Thin Mint-aholic.

But it doesn't take a lot of research to see that we have an epidemic of obesity in this country. And the last thing many of us really need are those irresistible faces pitching even more fat, albeit for a worthy cause. When I tell them "No," however, I hate myself.

But this year, I have a plan. I still don't want the diet-busters, but I'm going to offer the little charmers a donation instead. Then they can eat the cookies themselves. OK, girls?

— Kevin Kittredge

Career course

PUPPIES TO PARTNERS



Part One of a three-part series on training St. Francis Service Dogs

Coming April 12: Pups in prison — future service dogs spend time behind bars.



To see trainer Connie Kniseley work with future service dogs, go online at roanoke.com.

In the dimly lit Tanglewood Mall storefront on a warm, weekday afternoon, Blue, an 11-month-old Labrador retriever puppy, made his way through a scattering of stuffed animals placed intentionally in his path.

The soot-colored pup deliberately stepped around and over the toys, resisting the urge to grab each one as he concentrated on his handler.

But the smiling blue whale was just too big of a temptation.

"Leave it," Blue was told after he scooped up the toy. He dropped his coveted prize.



THE HAPPY WAG
Nona Nelson
pets@roanoke.com

On another pass through the gauntlet of stuffies, Blue gazed longingly at a penguin, but he passed it by. He was rewarded with a treat, enthusiastic praise and a play break.

Blue is in the middle of a two-year job-training program to prepare him for a career. Resisting the temptation to act on his normal doggy impulses will be critical

to his success.

Blue could one day become a service dog, a partner to a disabled person.

See WAG, 8

SAINT FRANCIS SERVICE DOGS

\$25,000 is invested in training each service dog to work with a partner

\$5,000 First year

- Selection and temperament testing of puppies
- All veterinary care including spay/neuter, vaccinations, physical exams
- Equipment and supplies including crate, food, collars, leashes, vests
- Training and socialization



\$10,000 Second year

- Professional training and assessment in weekly classes
- Continued veterinary care
- Equipment and supplies
- Testing for skills and behaviors



\$10,000 Continuing education

- Individual training for dog and partner in partner's home
- Monitoring for 6-month probation period
- Bi-annual recertification
- Training support for the working life of the dog (8 to 10 years)



SOURCE: Saint Francis Service Dogs

The Roanoke Times

"It opens up a new social world."

Marilyn Wilson
A dog trainer and puppy program coordinator

PUPPIES TO PARTNERS: Part One of a Three-Part Series

WAG: Dogs start their career course at a very early age

FROM 1

Partners for life

Hundreds of hours and tens of thousands of dollars are invested in raising and training each protege at Saint Francis Service Dogs, a Roanoke-based, nonprofit organization that provides assistance animals to physically and emotionally disabled adults and children in Virginia.

The program is rigorous — on average, four out of 10 dogs that begin training do not complete it and “career change” to household pets.

The dogs that graduate earn what is essentially a master’s degree in practical skills and obedience. They will go on to become personal assistants and constant companions to their partners.

Service dogs are trained to perform a multitude of household tasks — retrieving items, opening doors, carrying bags — that can be difficult for disabled people to accomplish alone. Loyal friendship is an added benefit to having a dog.

“The dog helps give them confidence to move forward with their lives,” Marilyn Wilson, dog trainer and puppy program coordinator, said. “Many of our partners are very lonely, and when they have that dog in their lives, it gives them someone to be with.”

Not only does the companion pooch ease anxiety and depression, but the friendly, well-mannered dog also can help make an emotional connection between his or her partner and the outside world.

“When they are out in public, people don’t see the disability. They see the dog,” Wilson said. “It helps people reach out and engage with the disabled person. It opens up a new social world.”

Born to serve

Saint Francis dogs start their career course at a very early age. Eight-week-old pups enter the program and are observed, examined and tested repeatedly to determine if they are suited for service work.

“The puppies need to be friendly, inquisitive and brave,” said Cabell Youell, executive



Photos by SAM DEAN | The Roanoke Times



Above: Trainers use real world experience, like an afternoon cruising through Tanglewood Mall, to help teach the dogs. Left: While training with handler Connie Kniseley, Midas hands a bottle of Coke over to a cashier at Gander Mountain.

Saint Francis Service Dogs

8232 Enon Drive, Roanoke, VA 24019; 342-3647

Applications to become a partner or a volunteer puppy raiser for a Saint Francis service dog can be found online at www.saintfrancisdogs.org

director of Saint Francis.

The pups are trained and observed by a network of volunteer puppy raisers, including inmates at Bland Correctional Center, that help Wilson and other staff trainers spot the ones most likely to succeed.

“If we see a dog that doesn’t enjoy the work, we don’t force them to do it,” Wilson said.

As they advance through the program, the dogs are trained through positive reinforcement and playful interactions.

“We make a game of it,” Wilson said.

The program is populated mainly by Labrador and golden retrievers — naturals at fetching

and holding items — but there is diversity in the current program including a standard poodle, a Belgian Tervuren (think of a shaggy German shepherd) and a couple of mutts. The candidates come from breeders and shelters.

Other homes will be found for dogs with common physical ailments such as hip dysplasia. Because the dogs accompany their partners in public, temperament extremes from shyness to exuberance will disqualify a dog from service.

“It does take a special dog,” Wilson said. “Our dogs get to go everywhere and experience so many things. They need confidence, and some are just not cut

out for the work.”

Reality checks

Training takes place not only at the Hollins-area headquarters, but also in trainers’ and puppy raisers’ homes and at an empty store donated by Tanglewood Mall.

After Blue’s puppy class was dismissed for the day, a class of older dogs ventured outside the classroom with their handlers, an important test for the dogs’ focus and obedience.

The dogs, sporting their signature red vests, rode the elevator, patrolled the mall and maneuvered the stairs, paying rapt attention to their handlers, unfazed by crying children, busy shoppers and the

smells of restaurant food.

“I don’t want to disturb him,” a curious shopper said as she caught the eye of Simon, a honey-colored retriever, as he walked the mall’s main floor.

“I want you to disturb him,” staff trainer Connie Kniseley said, reassuring the woman that learning to cope with distractions is an essential part of the dog’s training; a dog that can’t calmly stay on task in the real world could be a safety risk for a disabled person.

“Our partners like to go to the mall, so this is an ideal place to train,” said Niki Voudren, the organization’s development director.

Expensive lessons

Youell places a \$25,000 price tag on the cost of training a single service dog. That includes veterinary care, housing, transportation and years of professional training before and after the dogs are placed with a partner. Potential partners in the Roanoke-area pay a \$25 non-refundable application fee; other Virginia residents pay \$75 to apply. Once the dog is permanently placed with the partner, there is a \$200 fee for the dog’s equipment, including the crate, leash, collar and vest.

Voudren’s job is dedicated to fundraising and applying for grants. Saint Francis Service Dogs is funded solely by donations; no tax dollars support the program and training a service dog for a disabled person is not covered by health insurance, Youell said.

A capital campaign built a new facility last year on the 18-acre campus that eventually will serve as a kennel to house 40-plus dogs in various stages of training, which Youell said will help lower costs.

“We have to be very cactus-like with our money,” Youell said.

All the training and the money — and the effort to raise it — are worthwhile, Youell said, when the dogs are finally placed in what she calls their arranged marriage with their partners.

“We watch people that have been invisible in wheelchairs for years bloom,” Youell said. “We get to watch them go back out into the community and take part. We get to watch their lives turn around.”



SERVICE DOGS

often spend their formative months being trained by inmates at Bland Correctional Center — a deal that is beneficial to both inmate and pup.



Photos by SAM DEAN | The Roanoke Times

Above: Inmate Robert Scott works with his puppy as part of Saint Francis Service Dog's Prison Pup Program at Bland Correctional Center.
At top: Inmate Kenny Murray and other members of the program learn to handle their dogs in a training class.

On the inside

PUPPIES TO PARTNERS



Part Two of a three-part series on training St. Francis Service Dogs

Coming April 26: A Saint Francis service dog puts her skills to work.



THE HAPPY WAG
Nona Nelson
pets@roanoke.com

BLAND — Traveling from Roanoke to Bland County on a bright blue spring day to visit dog trainers is a great way to spend an afternoon.

Sun pouring through the car windows, driving by green farmland dotted with grazing cows and pastel-colored spring blooms. The journey was idyllic and relaxing.

But beyond the pastures, we turned toward the red brick buildings surrounded with layers of sturdy fencing and barbed wire.

A blaring siren served as a sobering reminder that while the setting is serene, our destination is the Bland Correctional Center.

This is prison. And no one wants to go to prison.

No one except maybe Frosty and Freya, two puppies training to be service dogs.

See **WAG**, 8

Puppy raiser gave his all for a chance

By Nona Nelson
nona.nelson@roanoke.com
981-3402

Many inmates have participated in the Saint Francis Service Dogs Prison Pups program in its eight-year existence at Bland Correctional Center.



Courtesy photo

Inmate John Bumgarner cuddles Summer Rose in 2007.

what it means to be a human being."

Bumgarner became a leader in the program. The shelves in his cell were covered with dog training books. He regularly corresponded with trainers and outside puppy raisers and sitters.

Cabell Youell, executive director of Saint Francis, said his only request was to raise a chocolate Labrador retriever puppy if one should enter the program.

In March 2007, a chocolate Lab was donated by a breeder to Saint Francis. Youell said the puppy was named Summer Rose, in honor of Bumgarner's daughter who had been killed in

None, perhaps, had as much impact as John Bumgarner.

Bumgarner was one of the original puppy raisers when the prison program started in 2002. Serving a long sentence for numerous larceny and breaking and entering convictions, Bumgarner said that working with dogs "puts you back in touch with

OUT & ABOUT BIRTH EXPO

Q: Are you pregnant or considering pregnancy?

A: Then the Birth & Baby Expo might interest you. The event is hosted by the New Life Birth Center, La Leche League of Roanoke and the International Cesarean Awareness Network of Southwestern Virginia.

Q: What is a baby expo?

A: The expo features programs on pregnancy, nutrition, childbirth, baby care and breastfeeding. It is a gathering where visitors can mingle with doulas, midwives and physicians.

Q: Will there be retailers showing the latest in baby gear?

A: Yes, vendors will display various baby and parenting goods and services.

Visitors also will be eligible for door prizes, samples, and other giveaways.

— Heather Brush

When: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday

Where: Tanglewood Mall, Roanoke

Cost: Free, donations accepted

Contact: 489-4064, www.newlifebirthcenter.net

BOOKMARK

● **Author Reading:** Mark Doty

Poet Mark Doty will read from his works. His "Fire to Fire: New and Selected Poems" won the National Book Award for Poetry in 2008. Doty's poems have also appeared in The Atlantic Monthly, The London Review of Books and The New Yorker.

When: 8 p.m., Friday

Where: Green Drawing Room, Main Building, Hollins University, 8060 Quadrangle Lane, Roanoke

Cost: Free

Contact: 362-6451

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CORNERSHOT

I want to thank four people who were kind, helpful and merciful to this excavating contractor. In the predicament I found myself in, I expected to be taken advantage of.

On March 27, a Saturday, I was trying to move a large piece of equipment from one job to another. While trying to enter the road, mud on my front tires caused my front end to slide off the road and onto the shoulder. The front sank to the axle and I was stuck, blocking the entire road.

I tried unsuccessfully to get out. A neighbor brought chains and one of the first drivers on the scene directed traffic. When we gave up and called a big wrecker (Woods Service Center in Vinton), I was shocked that he treated me more than reasonably. In this sort of situation, he could have named his price.

When a police officer arrived, she could have charged me for damaging the shoulder of the road. But she said if I repaired the damage there would be no charge. I gladly fixed it later that day.

It is encouraging to know that there are still good and honest people in this world.

— Mike Kinzie, a reader in Troutville

"It's given me confidence in myself. It's changed me because I found something I love doing." **Michael Dorman** | Former inmate at Bland Correctional Center

PUPPIES TO PARTNERS: Part Two of a Three-Part Series

WAG: Inmates, dogs must eventually part ways

Pups in prison

The two furry passengers in the Saint Francis Service Dogs van were happily wagging their tails when we arrived. After trainer Marilyn Wilson and volunteer Mary Wingfield unloaded bags of food and other supplies, all of which had to be X-rayed, the pups went inside to join their teachers — prisoners that will help them learn discipline, self-control and self-confidence.

There are 14 inmates at Bland in the Prison Pup Program, which places service dog trainees with constant companions who teach them basic commands and advanced skills.

The program launched in 2002, and since then most of the dogs Saint Francis has placed with disabled partners have spent at least some time at the medium-security facility.

Cabell Youell, Saint Francis' executive director, said that the program is helpful for the dogs, providing them round-the-clock attention from their trainer, a structured schedule and a controlled environment.

She said it's also helpful to the inmates. The program, she said, gives them an opportunity to help others while they serve their time.

Training classes

After we checked in and walked past the heavy iron gates, we entered the sun-drenched prison yard that was littered with pups, all wearing their red Saint Francis vests and accompanied by their inmate-handlers.

Their trainers led the students into the classroom, a long room with cinder block walls coated with many layers of industrial beige paint. Here Wilson conducted classes with younger and then older pups, getting updates on their progress.

Robert Scott, a 32-year-old from Abingdon serving time for robbery, has been in the program for five years and has trained seven dogs, including Buster, his current charge, a 4-month-old black Lab puppy.

"I've learned a lot of patience," he said. "And I've learned how to work with a group of people."

The dogs go through the same positive reinforcement training regime with the inmates as they do with outside puppy raisers. The pups are expected to learn basic commands such as sit, stay and come. They practice climbing



Photos by SAM DEAN | The Roanoke Times



Above: Inmate Robert Scott spends quality time with the puppy he is raising. Left: Trainer Marilyn Wilson supervises inmates as they work with their dogs.

Saint Francis Service Dogs

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stairs, learn the difference between left and right and are taught to retrieve specific items.

Wilson travels to Bland weekly to conduct classes with the inmates, who meet daily for their own classes and to share experiences and troubleshoot behavior challenges.

Spending 24 hours a day with their trainer allows the pups more opportunities to learn and it simulates the life they could one day lead with a partner.

Jermaine Niblett, 30, currently raising his second pup, described his experience with the dogs as priceless.

"I've enjoyed this responsibility," Niblett said. "It's so easy to be self-consumed in here."

Life in the dorm

Working with the pups is a privilege for the inmates. All the "pup men," as prison counselor and Saint Francis liaison Latasha Dowell calls them, reside in the honor dorm, the

preferred living quarters at Bland reserved for the most well-behaved prisoners. Inmates must remain free of violations to stay in the program and keep their puppies.

Inmates with convictions for domestic abuse, Youell said, are ineligible for the program because of concerns that they would be likely to abuse animals.

The prisoners, under supervision of guards, are allowed to take their dogs out to the yard whenever necessary. They share their 8-by-8-foot cells with their students, tucking the dogs' crates and supplies under their bunks.

While only a handful of inmates raise the dogs, the pups are a morale booster for the rest of the population, Dowell said.

"All the inmates care about the pups," she said. "They all watch out for the dogs."

Karl Manns, 47, was sent to Bland after a drug conviction and is currently raising Georgie, a 10-month-old Lab.

"They are all crazy about her," Manns said proudly of his pup.

Taking care of his trainee requires his complete focus, a fact not lost on his fellow inmates.

"They tell me, 'All you want to talk about is Georgie,'" he said. "Well, she's all I have to talk about."

Saying goodbye

Just like other puppy raisers, the men know that this sweet, eager pooch does not belong to them; as closely as they bond with the dogs, eventually the time comes to move on.

"They'll always bring me another one," Manns said. "You just can't get too attached. I'm doing this to help someone."

Picturing their pups with their eventual partners, adults and children with physical and emotional disabilities, makes giving them up bearable for most of the prisoner-trainers.

"When I get the dog, I know where he's going. He's going to help someone," Scott said. "It's hard, but you can make it easier on yourself by looking at it that way."

Still, after investing so much care into a dog, parting can be bittersweet.

"It sneaks up on you," Niblett said. "Some people act like it doesn't bother them, but it does a little."

On the other side

Acclimating to life on the outside can be difficult for pups, which is why Youell said the dogs are rotated between home puppy raisers and inmates.

Michael Dorman, 38, spent 11 years at Bland for an assault conviction. He worked in the pup program for the past four years.

Dorman said working with the dogs has given him new perspective.

"It's given me confidence in myself," the soft-spoken Dorman said. "I was always pretty much one to stay to myself. It's changed me because I found something I love doing."

After completing his sentence, he was released April 5 and returned to his family in Charlottesville.

First thing on his post-release to-do list: helping train his father's dog to stop jumping on people.

"That shouldn't be too hard," he said.

Nona Nelson's column runs every other Monday in Extra.

RAISER: He didn't get to finish his role

FROM 1

an accident while her father was serving his time.

The day that 8-week-old Summer Rose arrived at Bland was the happiest that the Saint Francis trainers had ever seen Bumgarner. He repeatedly thanked them for his new puppy.

Little did anyone know that his hours of happiness were numbered. Bumgarner, 42, died of a heart attack he suffered in the last minutes of that day's puppy class.

"John understood imprisonment, and so he served those who might be imprisoned by their disabilities," Youell wrote in the Saint Francis newsletter after Bumgarner died. "He served them with humility, selflessness and simple straightforward love."

Youell said that the other inmates and trainers rallied around Summer Rose. If the pup was cut out for the work, she would get every opportunity to become a service dog.

On April 8, Summer Rose passed her certification test with her partner, Frank Pividal of Roanoke.

"She's been a real blessing," Trena Pividal said of her husband's service dog. "They've formed a perfect bond."



Courtesy photo
Frank Pividal with his service-dog partner, Summer Rose

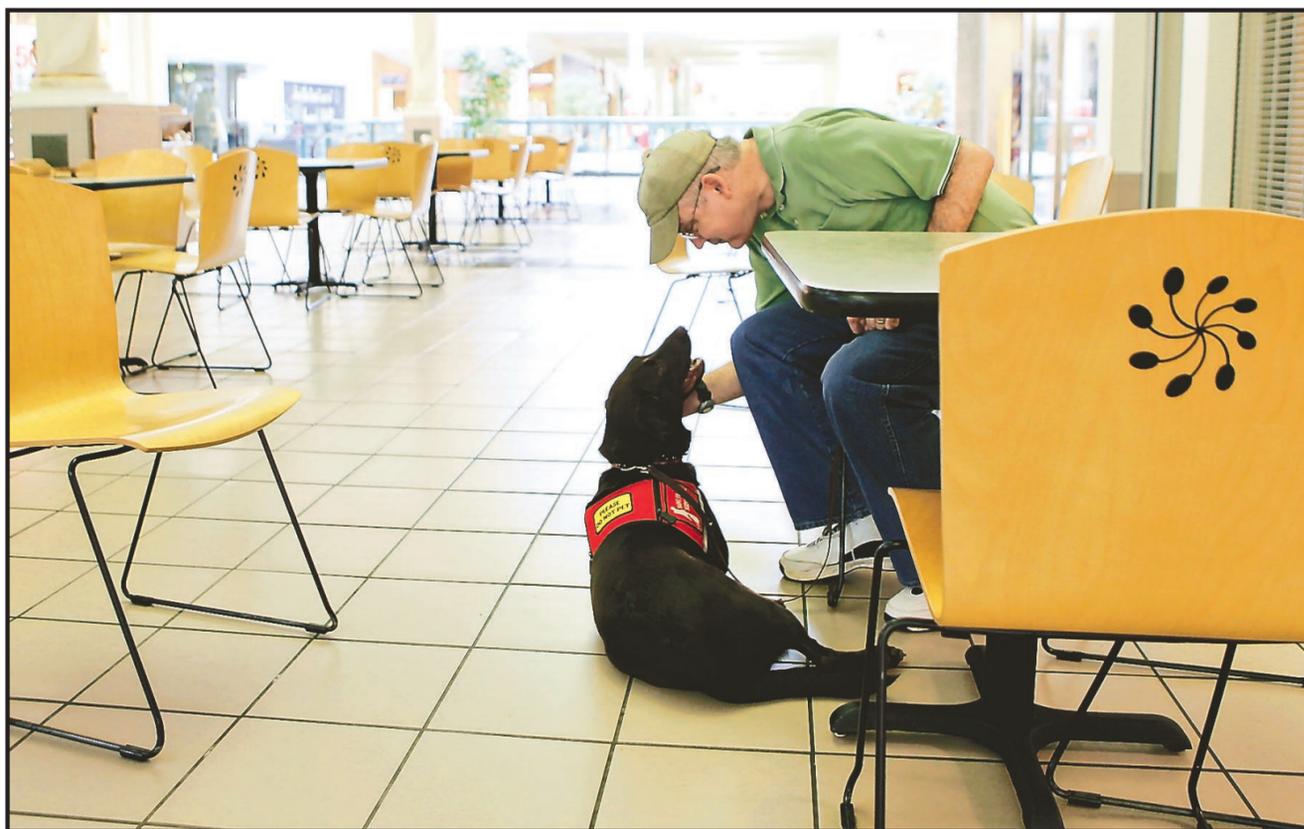
The Presidential Pet Museum in Williamsburg was founded in 1999 as a "repository and means of preserving information, artifacts, and items related to the Presidential Pets." More than 500 items of interest are displayed for lovers of pets, presidents and pet trivia. The museum is open year-round from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., except Christmas and New Year's Day.

— www.presidentialpetmuseum.com



FRANK PIVIDAL

is the first ALS patient to have a service dog from Saint Francis, which trains dogs to be personal assistants to disabled partners.



Photos by SAM DEAN | The Roanoke Times

Above: Frank Pividal pets his chocolate Lab service dog, Summer Rose, during final testing by St. Francis Service Dogs. Top: Pividal's wife, Trena, and Rose are greeted by Michael Palmer, the senior pastor at Green Ridge Baptist Church. The church plays a large role in the family's life.

Book launch party Tuesday

"Crossing Oceans" by Roanoke writer Gina Holmes is "not your grandma's fiction."

By Mike Allen
mike.allen@roanoke.com
981-3236

The plot of Roanoke writer Gina Holmes' first published novel, "Crossing Oceans," sounds like it's made to be a Hollywood tear-jerker, with room for a few Oscar-winning performances.



Gina Holmes

The 39-year-old author has had to explain the plot so many times she has her answer down pat.

"It's the story of a young mother who cuts all ties with her family and sets off to raise her little girl alone, until she learns she's dying. And then she has to go home to face the ghosts of her past and tell the man she left behind that he's about to inherit the daughter he didn't know he had."

You might not guess from that description that Holmes' novel was snatched up in 2008 by Tyndale House Publishers, the Christian publishing house best known for the blockbuster "Left Behind" series of best-selling novels that chronicles what happens to the people who remain on Earth after the rapture. Holmes isn't allowed to say what she was paid, but her advance has been reported in industry publications as falling somewhere between \$50,000 and \$100,000.

Tyndale is throwing its

See HOLMES, 5

CORNERSHOT

Don't tell me that people in Roanoke are not generous and helpful! I have proof they are ... many of them!

Recently, on April 17, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 1264 on Grandview Avenue in Roanoke was fortunate enough to have the Oscar Meyer Wienermobile at the post for a day, to draw a crowd for our fundraiser.

We celebrated with the sale of hot dogs, drinks and chips, we had a local country music band, The Ramblers, to entertain and the Boy Scout Council held a flag retirement on our parking lot.

Ahead of time, many, many businesses donated drinks, buns, chips, money, hot dogs and promotion; therefore, we did not have to buy anything to enhance our benefit's goal.

It was a fantastic success, thanks to one and all who helped us and made this a great day for veterans helping veterans.

— James Warren, commander, VFW Post 1264

'A real blessing'

PUPPIES TO PARTNERS



Part Three of a three-part series on training St. Francis Service Dogs

Saint Francis Service Dogs

8232 Enon Drive, Roanoke, VA 24019; 342-3647

Applications to become a partner or a volunteer puppy raiser for a Saint Francis service dog can be found online at www.saintfrancisdogs.org



Watch Summer Rose and Frank Pividal learn the ropes of a service dog partnership in a video at roanoke.com.

A casual observer may not understand why Frank Pividal needs a service dog.

Pividal, 50, seems able-bodied. He walks his neighborhood, shops at the mall and strolls downtown Roanoke. He is always accompanied by Summer Rose, a chocolate Lab that is allowed to enter any eatery and store with him because she sports the red vest that designates her as a Saint Francis Service Dog.

"Most people think he's her trainer," said Trena Pividal, Frank's wife.

But a closer look reveals why Summer Rose goes wherever Frank goes. His once broad shoulders are drooping. His once strong hands are losing their ability to grip.

The friendly man with a sweet sense of



THE HAPPY WAG
Nona Nelson
pets@roanoke.com

humor communicates now through slurred speech.

In 2007, Frank Pividal was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, commonly known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease.

ALS is a degenerative neurological disorder. At a rate determined by his own body chemistry, Frank's motor neurons,

the messengers between the brain and the body, are dying.

The death of these neurons leaves blank spaces between what Frank wants to do and what his body is able to do.

Rose, his service dog, is there to fill in the blanks.

See WAG, 8



"Most people think he's her trainer."

Trena Pividal about her husband and his service dog

Left: For now, Frank Pividal still has the strength to play with Rose.

PUPPIES TO PARTNERS: Conclusion of a Three-Part Series

WAG: Rose has been an answered prayer for the family

FROM 1

Right dog, right person

Frank Pividal is the first ALS patient to have a service dog from Saint Francis, the Roanoke-based organization that trains dogs to act as personal assistants and companions to disabled partners.

The Pividals applied for a service dog in March 2009. Once an application is approved, the candidate can wait anywhere from a few months to a few years to be placed with a dog suited to his or her needs.

The urgency of Frank's illness moved him up the list of those waiting for a dog, Saint Francis Executive Director Cabell Youell said.

Trainer Susan Maynard worked with Summer Rose, a then-2-year-old retriever that she described as smart, inquisitive and a hard worker.

Rose and the Pividals met in the summer of 2009 for the first of many interviews, a process that matches the talents and temperament of the dog with the candidate.

It's important, Trena said, for the right dog to be placed with the right person.

The couple was presented an inch-thick binder to study. The training provided by Saint Francis is as much for the partner as it is for the dog. Both Frank and Trena would need to know what to expect of their service dog and what they would need to do to care for her.

They studied their manual. They installed a fence in the back yard of their Hollins-area home.

Rose was the first dog that came for a home visit. She was, Trena said, a perfect fit for her family, which includes their 19-year-old son Trey.

After months of progressively longer in-home visits and practicing tasks under the supervision of Maynard, Youell left a voice mail message to tell the Pividals that Rose would be placed with them.

"I still have that message from Cabell," Trena said.

Off to work

When Rose came to live with the Pividals, Frank was still working as a senior network administrator at CBIZ Payroll in downtown Roanoke.

Rose accompanied Frank to his job, to lunch and home again every day.



SAM DEAN | The Roanoke Times

As she is trained to do, Summer Rose sits quietly at Frank Pividal's feet during a recent lunch.

When service dogs retire

Saint Francis Service Dogs live to serve their partners. But when circumstances change, so do the careers of these highly trained dogs.

Saint Francis Service Dogs Executive Director Cabell Youell said that as the dogs age, they naturally slow down and aren't able to perform all of the tasks their human partner needs.

At that point, the dog retires, his or her vest and collar are returned to Saint Francis, and the dog becomes a pet — either with the partner or another family.

A new service dog is then found for the person.

If the dog should outlive his or her partner, Youell said, the dog's future is determined

by the partner's family. The dogs almost always retire and remain in the home as pets.

There have been cases, she said, when the family of a deceased partner will donate a young service dog back to Saint Francis to be retrained to help another disabled person.

— Nona Nelson

She helped him at the office when she was needed, she stayed quietly out of the way when she wasn't.

Not unlike most people, Trena said, Rose preferred the weekends, when her routine was more relaxed.

"She didn't like Mondays, when she had to get dressed for work," Trena said with a laugh.

Due to his progressive disability, Frank retired in December. Now Rose gets to work mostly at home.

Service dogs perform routine tasks for their partners, including opening doors and drawers, and fetching phones and television remotes.

Having Rose's assistance with these functions, including helping Frank take

off his jacket and socks, gives his wife peace of mind while she works.

Trena, 50, a coordinator for the Roanoke Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau, said Rose "has been a real blessing. She gives me a sense of comfort."

Faith and support

What causes ALS and how quickly and savagely the disease will steal a patient's motor skills are a mystery.

On a sunny afternoon in the meeting hall of their church, Green Ridge Baptist in Northeast Roanoke, the Pividals, accompanied by Rose, attended a support group meeting with other ALS patients.

Despite a refreshment table that would send most dogs into major begging mode, Rose never sniffed a morsel of food. As plates were passed and wheelchairs buzzed around her, she remained calmly by Frank's side.

Rose is comfortable at Green Ridge, where she has her own dog bed in the media area where Frank runs the PowerPoint presentation for Sunday services.

Her regular attendance at the church prompted Mike Palmer, the senior pastor, to add Rose's name to the 800-member congregation's roll.

"She's the most gentle and peaceful dog I've seen in my life," the minister said.

Christian faith is a huge part of the Pividals' lives. Trena credits support from the Green Ridge church with helping her to deal with Frank's terminal illness.

The couple clings to their church and to their family, to the comfort of favorite hymns and to the belief that God's love will help them face this challenge.

Rose, Trena said, has been an answered prayer.

She knows the worst is yet to come. She knows that eventually her husband of 27 years will be unable to care for himself and that eventually Rose will be more of an assistant to her than to Frank.

Maynard said that Saint Francis will continue training to make sure Rose's skills meet the increasing demands that ALS will put on the family.

"Whatever tweaking we need, we will do it," Maynard said.

That support is what Trena said will sustain her in the months ahead.

"We have no doubt that whatever we need her to do, she will be able to do," Trena said. "Rose is a real angel."