

More than Books

Tomorrow we're going to the dogs

This Saturday, between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m., an enthusiastic crew of certified therapy dogs will be on deck for 20-minute sessions with children who would like to read aloud to willing pooch. Just show up or, if you like, sign up today for one of the sessions by calling the library at 815-233-3000. Say you want to register for tomorrow's "Paws for Reading" program.

Saturday morning Paws for Reading programs are regularly scheduled for the first Saturday of the month. If you can't make this Saturday's event, another "Paws" program will be coming up September 6.

Not just any dog

"Paws for Reading" dogs are trained, certified therapy dogs who, along with their handlers, have passed the Therapy Dogs International, Inc. testing requirements for health, safety, appropriate skills, and temperament. A local group of Therapy Dogs International, Inc. graduate teams began meeting monthly over seven years ago to exchange tips and tricks. A number of those teams are frequent visitors at local nursing homes and are gearing up to participate in FHN's recently launched therapy dogs program, "Beyond Words."

Not all certified therapy dogs are suited for the library's "Paws for Reading" program, however. Paws for Reading dogs must be really good listeners.

Dogs Can't Read

Okay, okay, I know dogs can't read! But I also know they can be terrific listeners. I've seen their presence alone create an inviting, relaxed environment, which makes them ideal reading companions in my book.

Reading aloud is an important part of building literacy, but reading in front of classmates can be downright scary. Dogs, on the other hand, are not going to laugh, judge, or criticize any child's reading ability.

I used to say dogs are attentive and non-judgmental listeners. Yes and no. Many dogs become so relaxed they actually go to sleep during the sessions. More than once, I confess, I've had to explain that my very own certified therapy dog, Frances, has closed her eyes so she can really concentrate on the story.

Dogs are fun

Learning to read with ease and assurance can be a tricky process. Wanting to read is just as important as knowing how to read. That's another reason to try this program. Dogs are a lot of fun, and they can make reading fun, rather than work.

I've been told many children actually enjoy reading for the first time when they are paired with a dog and the dog's handler. All children, including those who already read well, can benefit from the program, though: there's nothing like sharing a good book with a friend.

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