

More than Books

A Tribute to Syd

Cathy William's Doberman Syd AKA Sydney Bean died January 27. Cathy is the activities coordinator for our local therapy dog group, and Syd has been one of the stars of the library's "Paws for Reading" program as well as a regular visitor to area nursing homes and schools.

Syd was an ambassador for his breed and a 70+ pound argument against breed discrimination. His gentle manner and love of children helped a lot of kiddos get over a fear of large dogs at the same time he dispelled those awful stereotypes about Doberman Pinschers.

Learning to read with ease and assurance can be a tricky process. Syd was a terrific listener! He never laughed, judged, or criticized. He always allowed his reading partners to proceed at their own pace.

He was the special favorite of a boy in a summer school class. The boy's teacher, Kathi Myers, agrees that Syd was just the motivation the little fellow needed to become more confident and actually learn to enjoy reading.

Thanks to Cathy, a recently retired teacher herself, Syd was able to live up to his full potential as a certified therapy dog. Syd also excelled in obedience and advanced nosework classes at Carlson Canine Camp.

Whenever I saw Syd after my pooch Pete died, I'd think of Pete and the fun the two of them had playing together at Carlson's doggy daycare. I've lost a connection to Pete with Syd gone. I don't know how I will ever tell Frances.

Going to the Dogs

A Freeport School District reading class – they named themselves The Book Invaders – comes to the library the first Wednesday of each month to hear a "celebrity reader" and practice reading aloud to certified therapy dogs. The celebrity readers run the gamut from elected officials to local authors.

Dogs and their handlers are here first Saturday of each month, from 10 to 11 a.m., for our "Paws for Reading" program. Any children who come in during that hour will be matched up for a twenty minute session with their own non-judgmental and attentive listeners.

Oops! I'd better amend that last sentence. Some dogs are so relaxed that they actually go to sleep during the sessions. If that happens, a handler may have to explain that Max has closed his eyes so he can really concentrate on the story.

All our "Paws for Reading" dogs, large and small, along with their handlers, have passed the Therapy Dogs International, Inc. certification test. They are trained dogs who have been tested for health, safety, and appropriate skills and temperament.

Our local therapy dog group has been meeting since 2007. A number of us who are already going to nursing homes, schools, and libraries are looking forward to visiting FHN facilities when their new therapy dogs program, "Beyond Words," takes off.

Library Director Carole Dickerson may be reached by phone at 815-233-3000, ext. 216 or by email at cdickerson@freeportpubliclibrary.org.