

**SUCH A BLESSING**  
**CHASE JOHNSON &**  
**AUTISM ASSIST DOG WANDA**  
**BY: LAURIE CARLSON**

Michelle Johnson of Apple Valley, Minn. smiles broadly when asked how it feels to have an Autism Assist Dog placed with her son, Chase. “It feels great!” she says, “Wanda is such a blessing already.”

Joe and Michelle have two children, an older daughter, Natalie, and a younger son, Chase. When Chase was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, it started a journey for the entire family. Although Chase is a sweet and affectionate little boy, he was nonverbal and would become very frustrated when not able to communicate. He could not sleep through the night, and had difficulty with over stimulation.

Despite these hurdles, his parents were determined to stay active. Michelle says they enjoy being outside as much as possible, to take walks and have picnics. She deliberately adds “as a family.” They were determined to keep Chase involved in the outside world.

The couple heard about Can Do Canines through a support group for moms with children living with Autism. Michelle had always been a dog lover, and Chase enjoyed larger dogs so it seemed a great option for them. After doing some research, they applied.

While waiting to be accepted into the program, a relative made a workplace donation to Can Do Canines. This last spring, an invitation was extended to attend the annual Tails of Independence fundraising luncheon, and Michelle’s cousin asked her to go with. She says,



“I got to go to the luncheon. I was **so** excited, and learned so much on all the different types of jobs the dogs can do.”

Finally, word came to the Johnson family that they were next on the list for a dog! After a home visit by a Can Do Canines trainer, they were accepted. Chase was matched with Wanda, a sweet three year old black Labrador Retriever.

When asked about the training process, Michelle says, “Wanda makes it all easier. She’s loving, bonded quickly to Chase, and is well trained.” The hardest part for the rest of the family, especially older sister Natalie, was to respect the working relationship between Chase and Wanda and to not treat her as a family pet. Natalie agrees, “At first it was hard to respect the bond. I **do** get to groom her though. I love Wanda, how can you not?”

During first week Chase slept through the night – for the first time EVER. Michelle says, “Although it’s not every night, it’s a great start, and certainly not like it was before. So the whole family sleeps better. Everyone is more relaxed and happy because Chase is.” Chase knows his part of the job too – when walking with Wanda, they just have to say



CHASE GIVES WANDA A HUG  
WHILE OUT AT THE MALL

“walk your dog” and he takes the handle on Wanda’s vest. He understands and doesn’t protest or melt down.

Michelle related an example of how Wanda has helped Chase, “We had a couple of therapy sessions scheduled one day and decided to take Wanda along. While waiting for his next session, many students passed by in the hallway. Normally this would have upset and distracted him – he gets very aroused and vocal, but Chase remained very focused and sat next to Wanda, holding his handle. He stayed calm – it was great!”



GREG RONNING AND AGGIE

## HEROIC BOND

### GREG RONNING & HEARING ASSIST DOG AGGIE BY: MARISA PAPSIN

Greg Ronning of Elk River, Minn. is thoroughly enjoying his retirement. An avid horseman, Greg enjoys his time working in his stable and being with the horses. Still, Greg felt something was missing and knew, because of his hearing loss, that he was also missing some important sounds in his environment. While serving in the Vietnam war, Greg suffered over an 80% hearing loss in both ears. Even with the assistance of his hearing aids he still has more than a 50% hearing loss.

Greg's hearing loss severely affects his day to day activities. It is often hard to hear friends and family call, to know when someone is at the door, or even hear an oven timer buzz when he is cooking. At night, without his hearing aids, he may not hear a fire alarm or an intruder.

He decided it was time to get a different kind of assistance. Greg had heard of Can Do Canines and their work with assistance dogs. In the Tails from Minnesota newsletter he came across an article about how specially trained dogs can help the hearing impaired, and he decided to give it a try. In his application Greg wrote, "a Hearing Assist Dog would afford me the luxury of being able to know when someone is calling or at my door. A dog would be an invaluable companion

who could let me know when the oven timer goes off. He/she would be someone to talk with, exercise and go places with and be a much valued part of my family."

Soon Greg was matched with a beautiful German Shepherd and Labrador Retriever mix named Aggie. His new pal was donated by Second Hand Hound Rescue. A Kansas native, Aggie was just a young pup when she first came to Can Do Canines but she was smart and energetic and quickly learned the skills she needed to become a Hearing Assist Dog.

The greatest thing anyone can do is to serve – rather that is to serve your country as Greg did or to serve someone in need such as Aggie is doing – it creates a bond that is strong.

Greg and Aggie bonded quickly and training was fun. Now Aggie alerts Greg to sounds such as an alarm clock, a knock on the door, or an oven timer. She has also filled that long awaited void to have an incredible companion. They go walking every day, and she provides the peace of mind to Greg that he will not miss the sounds important to him.

Somehow life seems to be utterly serendipitous when a hero, gets a hero and both seem to live happily ever after.

## THE RIGHT DOG

HEATHER LEIDE &

DIABETES ASSIST DOG BECCA

BY: CARRIE SHERNO

Heather Leide is an architect living and working in Minneapolis, Minn. She's an avid bicyclist who just completed a century ride (100 miles in one day) in September. She's part of a cooking club, enjoys knitting, reading and traveling. Heather also has Type 1 Diabetes, something people may not have known until Becca became her constant companion.

Heather's diabetes is complicated by hypoglycemic unawareness, which means she has no symptoms when her blood sugar gets too low. It also means a glucose monitor or a testing strip is never far away. When Heather began to consider the benefits of a Diabetes Assist Dog, she wasn't sure at first if it was right for her. "It would make my condition, which was very easy to make invisible, a very visible thing," Heather says.

Meeting a woman who had her own Diabetes Assist Dog was all the convincing Heather needed. She was inspired by the positive impact it had on this woman's life. That's when Heather reached out to Can Do Canines.

She was teamed up with Becca, a smart, happy Labrador Retriever. Becca was part of Can Do Canines first "Prison Puppy" program at Sandstone Federal Prison. Inmates spent hours a day training Becca. On weekends, she would go home with prison employees to get the public exposure she needed.

Heather and Becca bonded very quickly. "I was surprised how easy it was," Heather says. "I expected the challenges to be training me, but



HEATHERLEIDE AND BECCA

she seems so well trained that my shortcomings don't mess her up."

Becca alerts Heather to her low blood sugars, faster than any of the technology she's depended on for years. On more than one occasion, the team's morning walk has become serious business for Becca. "All of the sudden, she was right next to me in heel, staring at me very intensely," says Heather. Even though she felt fine, Heather tested anyway and was very low. "She's done that a couple of times on walks," Heather says.

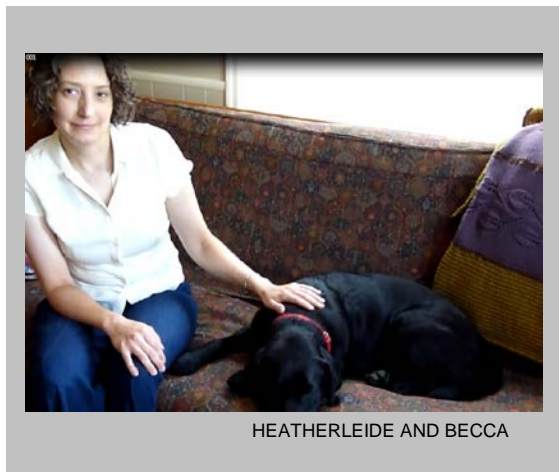
Not only does Becca alert Heather, she will bring a juice box or a meter on command. Just as important, Becca will sit with her head on Heather's lap when she's experiencing a low. Heather says the emotional connection helps her feel less scared. "She's amazing. I'm so fortunate to have her in my life, I love her to pieces."

Heather's friends and family with diabetes are just as protected. Becca also alerts them when they're experiencing a low. She stares intently and Heather reminds them to check their blood sugar.

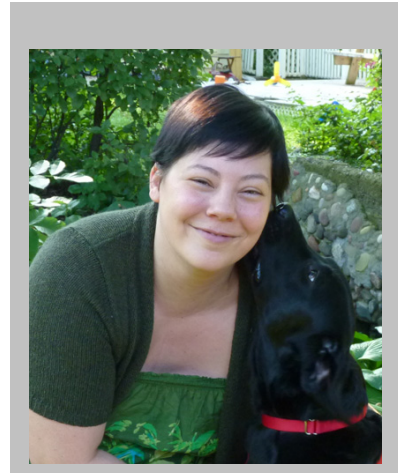
Heather doesn't feel the need to keep her diabetes from people anymore. In fact, she's become more an advocate for her condition. She doesn't really have a choice with Becca by her side. People have questions and Heather is happy to provide answers.

Heather has a few words for Can Do Canines, the puppy raisers, trainers and donors who made Becca possible, "Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. You guys got me the right dog."

Look for Heather and Becca out on the bike trails next spring. They'll be training for their next century ride, together!



**THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD  
SARAH BREIDENBACH AND  
DIABETES ASSIST DOG MOXIE  
BY ANNE INGVOLDSTAD**



Sarah Breidenbach is a young wife and mother of a son from Maplewood, Minnesota who has lived most of her life with type 1 diabetes. She is a nurse by profession and had always been able to manage her diabetes but lately she was experiencing rapid changes to her glucose levels. After a severe hypoglycemic (low blood sugar) episode sent her to the hospital in a grand mal seizure resulting in a head injury, her doctor recommended that Sarah apply to Can Do Canines for a Diabetes Assist Dog.

Can Do Canines was able to match Sarah with a friendly black Labrador Retriever named Moxie. Sarah was amazed at how quickly Moxie started alerting her to low blood sugar levels. On her third night with Sarah, Moxie woke her up out of a sound sleep at 4 AM by licking her face. Sarah checked her blood sugar and it was low. Moxie's persistence really gave Sarah a new level of confidence and she could now get a good night's rest.

In the past, if her husband was out of town Sarah would set her alarm to wake up every hour during the night to check her blood sugar. She would have to poke her finger 24 or more times a day because her blood sugar could change so rapidly. But now with Moxie around, she doesn't have to do that anymore. In Sarah's words, "Moxie has lifted the weight of the world off my shoulders."

Sarah is a floor manager at the Presbyterian Home in Bloomington, Minnesota. She works in an office surrounded by residents' rooms, and brings Moxie to work with her every day. The residents and the

rest of the staff love Moxie. One day Sarah was about 30 feet down the hall in a resident's room, and Moxie started nudging Sarah's office partner, Amanda. Amanda brought Moxie down the hall to Sarah and knocked on the resident's door, asking Sarah if she was all right. Sarah said she was fine, but Amanda replied, "Moxie doesn't think so." When Sarah stopped what she was doing to check her blood sugar, she found that it was low.

Moxie seems to have found her true calling as a Diabetes Assist Dog. Over the Fourth of July, Sarah and her family were sitting curbside at a parade when Moxie started to pull at her leash. This seemed a little odd, but Sarah checked her blood sugar just to be sure. When a woman a couple of seats over saw Sarah checking, she mentioned that she had diabetes too. Sarah saw that her own blood sugar was fine, but suggested that the woman might want to check HER blood sugar. When she did, she found that it was low. The stranger said "Is that what that dog does for you?" Sarah gave her one of Can Do Canines' cards.

Moxie has made it possible for Sarah to regain her independence by relieving worries about her own safety and her son's safety if there is not another adult present. When asked what she would like to say to all the volunteers and donors who make Can Do Canines possible, Sarah says, "I can't thank them enough for giving me my life back, and giving me a sense of security. You've changed my life and my family's life. All I can say is thank you."

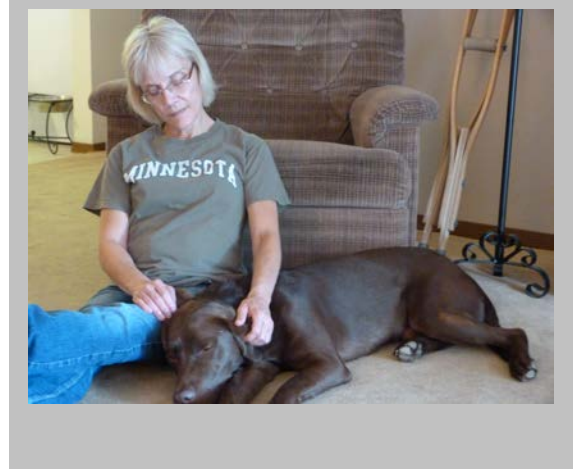
**A CONFIDENT CHUCKLE**  
**LORI THORN &**  
**MOBILITY ASSIST DOG CHUCK**  
**BY LAURIE CARLSON**

Lori Thorn of Vadnais Heights, Minn, is your typical empty nester. She enjoys working out with her personal trainer, loves to read, go to garage sales and spend time with friends and family.

However, living with a physical disability presents a challenge in staying independent. Having been diagnosed with Spina Bifada at birth, Lori has had to compensate for poor balance and other mobility issues her whole life. A leg amputation complicates matters and she must use a prosthesis on one leg and a brace on the other. This results in frequent falls, and difficulty in accomplishing everyday tasks.

Lori first heard about Can Do Canines from a person with a Mobility Assist Dog she met while shopping nearly three years ago. The lady recommended Lori check us out, but she put it off. Last year, when Lori's daughter left for college, she found herself living alone. "I never realized until then how much I had relied on Melanie's help." It was now much harder on Lori to live on her own. She decided to apply for a Mobility Assist Dog and wrote in her application, "I believe an assistance dog would help me greatly with some of my activities and daily living. Especially as I am getting older, have more medical issues and it's become more challenging to stay independent."

Paired with Chuck, an 18 month old chocolate Labrador Retriever, learning to work as a team was hard work at first. "I felt like I was the one in training, not Chuck!" she laughs. "It was fun but I felt like I was back in school, trying to remember all the commands he already knew." Now that they've completed training and are an official team, Lori says "I feel 100% more confident. We've now gone on two outings all by ourselves: to the gym to work out, and we went to the dentist. My confidence has gone even higher!"



"Chuck is a calming effect for me. In the past I would have panic attacks in certain situations, but he helps me stay calm." Laundry was something Lori would dread but now with Chuck's help it is much easier. "I don't have to make several trips now, it saves on my energy." He also retrieves dropped items like keys, her crutches and gets her phone in case of an emergency. He helps 'brace' for her so she can get off the floor, especially since she likes to snuggle with him and needs help getting back up.

Chuck also makes her laugh, and she affectionately uses his nickname, "Chuckles" often. In the morning he always brings her something – usually a toy, to wake her up and get her attention. He flirts with her when he wants to be petted, and always seems to be carrying something in his mouth – preferably a toy. (a typical Lab)

When asked if she'd like to say anything to Can Do Canines supporters, Lori praises Chuck's puppy raiser, "You did such a good job with him. He wouldn't be the great dog he is without you!" She also commends donors to Can Do Canines, "You do a really big service to those of us who need and want an assistance dog. Please give whatever you can - every bit helps!"

**A FULL HEART  
MARY IVY & MOBILITY ASSIST  
DOG TESSA  
BY SHELLY HIEMER**

Friendly and outgoing is how friends describe Mary Ivy of White Bear Lake. She loves sewing, shopping and church activities but most of all, they say she loves dogs. So when Mary had to give up her pet dog, her heart felt empty.

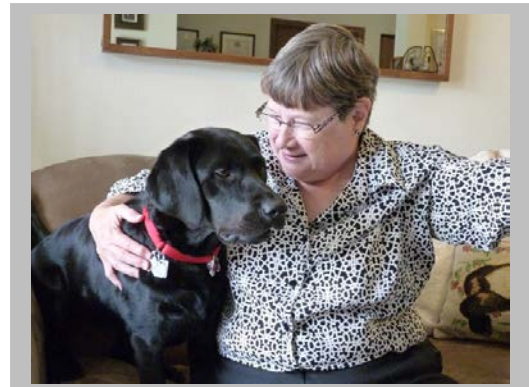
When she decided to fill her heart again, Mary thought about her own lifestyle. Having contracted polio as a child, she was now suffering from worsening post-polio syndrome. It was causing more pain, a loss of mobility and fatigue. Mary relies on a wheelchair and leg braces for mobility. Bending over to pick things up was difficult at best and simple tasks like laundry were taking a big toll on her energy reserves.

When it was time to fill her heart again with another dog, Mary thought, “What if my new dog could help me with my disability, too?” She made a few calls and was put in touch with Can Do Canines. She was soon matched with Mobility Assist Dog Tessa, a black Labrador Retriever.

Training was fun and a challenge. Mary says, “She had to learn to pay attention to the person sitting down – me in my wheelchair - not the person standing up. It took a little time but I think she has me pretty well trained now, too!” The strong bond between the two was quickly very evident.

Now Tessa retrieves dropped items, tugs off Mary’s coat and gloves, can get an emergency phone, and opens doors for her. Lately she has even taken to cleaning up by closing doors and drawers without being asked. In addition, Mary says little things like when Tessa helps take the clothes out of the dryer helps her conserve her energy.

Mary says, “With Tessa I have a better comfort level being by myself, my fatigue is less. She is always by my side, no matter what kind of day I am having - I just feel better all over!”



MOBILITY ASSIST DOG TESSA

She continues, “Tessa is a wonderful dog. I am so thankful for all of the people who made Tessa possible for me. You have done so much to make my life better, easier, and much fuller. Thank you.”