

## VITAL VIRGIL

### DONNA TAYLOR AND MOBILITY ASSIST DOG VIRGIL

BY: SHELLY HIEMER

For mom and grandma Donna Taylor life has always been busy. A self-employed consultant who enjoys movies, reading and dining out with friends, she is well known in her Eden Prairie, Minn. community as a bubbly person who loves animals. It was no surprise to friends when she wanted to add a puppy to her home two years ago.

Enter Virgil, an adorable Golden Retriever puppy. Donna soon enrolled him in obedience classes and began the hard work involved with raising any young puppy. Together they sailed through the classes. Donna says Virgil watched other dogs in the classes and quickly repeated what they did to perfection. That is when she knew he was really special.

Over the time she was raising Virgil, Donna's health began to decline. Severe polyarthritis was making it very difficult to bend over to pick up dropped items. The simple act of opening a kitchen drawer had become painful for her. Her balance was becoming more unstable and a progressive hearing loss was adding to concerns for her safety. Donna found herself relying more and more on family and friends.

A chance meeting one day prompted Donna to think about her pet dog in a different way. She met a Can Do Canines Mobility Assist Dog team and thought, "What if Virgil could do that for me?" She spoke with her trainer and veterinarian. They both thought Virgil would be a good candidate. Donna applied and began the process of having Virgil assessed for training as a Can Do Canines assistance dog. His obedience classes, physical health, personality and ability to handle public situations all had to meet the same standards as any puppy raised in the Can Do Canines program.



Virgil passed with flying colors and training began in earnest. "Training was fun," Donna says, "I think I enjoyed it because of how happy Virgil was to do all the things we asked. I am amazed at how smart he is!" Virgil has learned to retrieve dropped items, open drawers, and steady Donna on their daily three mile walk. His training in public to become a "good citizen" progressed easily. He learned to rest quietly under a table in a restaurant, ignore food on grocery store shelves, and keep his attention on Donna – not part of a pet dogs' routine. "Virgil knows he is working when his vest goes on" Donna says. "His demeanor is different. Even without his vest though, he is always there for me."

Virgil has also learned to alert Donna to visitors knocking at the door, though that was a bit more of a challenge. Her friends had gotten so used to her not hearing them knock and having difficulty opening the door that they just walked in. She had to post a note on the front door asking them to knock and wait outside for Virgil to do his job. He would then alert Donna that they were there, take her to the door and open it for her. Having the security of a new doorman has given Donna and her friends extra peace of mind.

"It is so worth it and I love doing it." Having the assistance dog training that Can Do Canines provided created a whole new relationship for Donna and Virgil. "He is always there and does so many things for me, especially when others are not there to help. Virgil and dogs like him are so vital to people like me. Thank you Can Do Canines."



BRYCE MADSEN AND DALLAS

## AN INCREDIBLE BOND

### BRYCE MADSEN AND MOBILITY ASSIST DOG

### DALLAS

### BY MARY SCHELDE

Like most nine-year-olds, Bryce Madsen is very social, has lots of friends, and enjoys sports of all kinds. He loves video games, likes being outside, and camps with his family in the summer. He shares his Woodbury, Minn. home with his parents, Kelly and Dan, and brother, Carter. However, Bryce is also unique. He has Spinal Muscular Atrophy, a form of Muscular Dystrophy.

Bryce's condition makes his muscles weaker as he gets older. He uses a power wheelchair to get around. If he drops items, he cannot bend over to pick them up and must rely on his family to do many things he cannot do for himself.

Kelly and Dan realized years ago that a Mobility Assist Dog would be a great benefit for Bryce and dreamed he would one day have one. When the time was right, they applied to Can Do Canines and finally their hopes and dreams came true! Recently added to their family was Dallas, a nineteen-month-old Rough Coat Collie.

When asked how training has gone, Bryce and his family say, "A lot easier than we thought it would be!

It's been interesting, fun and exciting." They feel their training has been very thorough. They felt well prepared for Dallas's arrival and for creating the bond between Bryce and Dallas.

Dallas has proven to be a quick learner and very intelligent.

They give him all the credit saying "He is a wonderful dog." The process of bonding and training with Dallas has taken some time away from Bryce's video game playing but when asked if the work was worth it, Bryce smiles and says, "Yes, it's worth it."

Dallas retrieves items for Bryce so that he doesn't have to call his family for help. He can find the telephone in an emergency, helps Bryce reposition his legs so he can be more comfortable, and is very attentive to all of Bryce's needs. Kelly calls it "an incredible bond. If Bryce screams or gets hurt Dallas runs right to him and starts licking him. He doesn't lick us!" In fact, Bryce and his parents have gained so much security and reassurance since Dallas joined their family, that they all feel comfortable leaving Bryce and Dallas home while running quick errands. "Without Dallas, I'd never leave him home." Kelly says. "As Bryce gets older, that freedom is something that he will really want." Kelly also feels this has helped Bryce gain a lot of confidence and independence, and has made him more responsible.

When asked about Can Do Canines, Bryce says, "I think the volunteers and people who donate are really nice to do this for people so they don't have to have their mom and dad do so much for them. And it gives them a partner to be with and help them."

*To help more kids like Bryce receive special dogs like Dallas, visit our website at [www.can-do-canines.org](http://www.can-do-canines.org)*

**RIGHT ON CUE**  
**CHUCK BARSTOW & MOBILITY ASSIST DOG**  
**DASH**  
**BY LAURIE CARLSON**

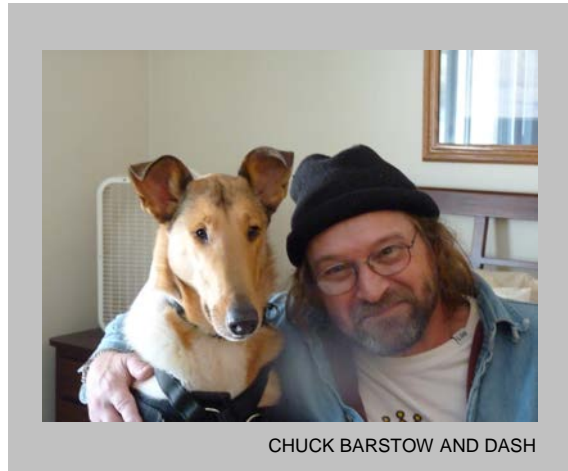
Charles (Chuck) Barstow of Sandstone, Minn. led a normal, active lifestyle until a workplace accident four years ago caused a traumatic brain injury. He has significant memory impairment and has to use cue cards to remember how to do simple everyday tasks. Chuck also lives with chronic pain, weakness and limited mobility.

Life now is very low key and consists of outings to appointments for physical and occupational therapy, and short walks going to the store. It's hard for Chuck to move around and he needs to use a cane or walker.

Chuck's father, Charles Sr., discovered Can Do Canines on the internet. He thought a Mobility Assistance Dog could help Chuck, making life easier and giving him more independence.

In his application Chuck stated, "I need a dog that is loving and compassionate. I would like him to help me feel less anxious, open doors for me, retrieve items I drop, to go out in public with me, and bring me a phone in an emergency."

After his application was accepted in 2011 he was paired with Dash, a handsome 18-month-old Smooth Coat Collie. As odds would have it, Dash was raised and trained in the nearby Sandstone Federal Penitentiary by inmates. He had weekend 'furloughs' with prison employees and their families where he learned social skills in public settings. When it came time for him to go to the Can Do Canines facility for final training and placement, one of his inmate puppy raisers wrote, "Dash is a very outgoing dog, very friendly with other dogs and people. He tends to be a little vocal at times, but I guess that's how Collies are. I hope Dash will bring you as much joy as he did me."



CHUCK BARSTOW AND DASH

There was a lot of work for this team to do, and quite a few commands that Chuck had to learn, so cue cards were made up for daily dog care and training. In addition to the tasks Chuck said he needed, Dash provides a counter balance to aid him in keeping his balance. Dash also learned to get his leash when Chuck was ready to take him outside.

Chuck and Dash bonded very quickly. His field trainer, Jake Schneider, says, "One day we were doing some work in Chuck's home and at the [grocery store](#). Due to Chuck's memory problems he had a hard time remembering the commands to give Dash. I remember he gave Dash a command not on the list but Dash did what Chuck was asking. It amazed me how Dash knew what Chuck wanted even though he didn't really know the word being used. To me that's the day they connected as a team."

Due to Chuck's problems with memory, he doesn't really remember the day Dash was placed with him. However he does know that Dash is an ever-present comfort and helper to him now, and that has given him greater peace of mind and more confidence to face life's every day challenges.

*To make more dogs like Dash available for people on our waiting list, please visit [www.can-do-canines.org](http://www.can-do-canines.org). Thank you!*

**MY LITTLE BUDDY  
MICHAEL CEMINSKY AND  
MOBILITY ASSIST DOG BLAKE  
BY KAREN ZIEMNIAK**

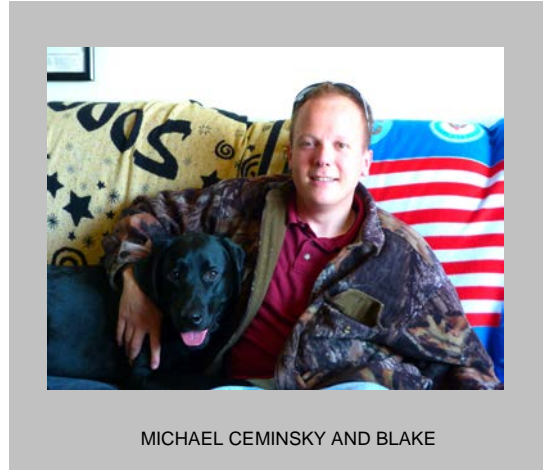
Michael Ceminsky is an outgoing, fun-loving guy. Living in northern Minnesota, he loves hunting and fishing with his friends, especially at Island Lake. Mike is employed by the University of Minnesota-Duluth in the maintenance department.

Seven years ago Mike contracted Ataxia, a condition that results in a lack of muscle coordination during movements such as walking or bending over to pick up dropped items. Ataxia affects his mobility, speech, and sense of balance. Although Mike has strong upper body strength, he cannot walk without assistance and uses a wheelchair and a walker to get around.

After Mike's diagnosis, his family learned about assistance dogs and Can Do Canines. He applied and was matched with Mobility Assist Dog Blake, a friendly, energetic black Labrador Retriever. Mike says training was definitely a lot of work but it has really paid off in the freedom he has gained. He proudly says, "Blake quickly learned exactly what I needed him to do for me. The trainers did a great job."

Blake can retrieve Mike's wallet, his shoes, open doors and most importantly, get a phone in case of an emergency. The staff at the university, many of whom are female, also love Blake. Mike laughs, "Blake is kind of a chick magnet. He's gotten kind of spoiled. They have a little bag of treats there just for him."

Mike has this to say about the volunteers and donors of Can Do Canines: "I really appreciate them. They definitely help people like me who need an assistance dog and can have one free of charge. Blake is a great dog, he is my little buddy. Thank you."



MICHAEL CEMINSKY AND BLAKE

*Blake and assistance dogs like him are made possible by the generous donations of dog breeders, name a puppy participants, and donors just like you. Would you like to help create the next team?*

*Go to <http://can-do-canines.org/how-you-help/> to find out how!*

