

# Trained dogs give freedom, independence to the deaf

United Press International

JEFFERSON, Mass. — Dawn and Dave Sharp came all the way from Dale City, Va., to buy their new dog, Valerie, from Bryant Hill Farm, and not because she was a rare breed.

Valerie is just your plain old animal shelter pooch. Well, almost.

She is a well-disciplined hearing dog who will make it possible for her new deaf mistress, Dawn Sharp, to move about with greater freedom and independence in her silent world.

The dog was trained by Donald MacMunn, founder and director of Hearing Dogs International, who considers deafness is "an underground problem because no one talks about it."

"Society is ashamed of it, so we hide it," Mac Munn said. "Deaf people tend to become withdrawn from a world which they can't hear, but the hearing dog can provide emotional support and stability as well as performing its role as a prosthetic aid. The dog may become the deaf person's new best friend."

Sharp also is eight months pregnant, and although she is capable of taking care of herself, the added security of a way to alert her to the newborn baby's cries for food, atten-

tion, or even help will be a great comfort.

Hearing dogs for the deaf is not a new concept, but the idea has been overshadowed by its counterpart, the seeing eye dog.

With over 20 million deaf or hearing impaired people in the United States and only a handful of training programs, the demand for hearing dogs far exceeds the supply, said MacMunn.

He says there are only about 25 similar programs in the U.S. which train a total of 300-400 dogs each year.

MacMunn, a former president of Holliston Junior College, got into the business through a project performed in the school's Department of Animal Science. It involved training dogs to respond to sounds using positive reinforcement techniques.

If dogs could be trained to distinguish and respond to sounds like doorbells and alarm clocks, they could serve as mobile hearing devices for deaf people.

MacMunn left the school and set up the Jefferson Educational Center, the base for his non-profit Hearing Dogs International. Over the last seven years, he has trained nearly 200 dogs by himself and the help of volunteers.

The dogs he trains come from pounds and animal shelters. Using a carefully designed series of tests, MacMunn examines each dog for sound response, temperament, curiosity and intelligence, playfulness, obedience and other characteristics.

He tests each canine for 20-30 minutes, and it takes from up to 10 tests before he finds one promising enough to train.

At Bryant Hill Farm the dog undergoes a three-to-five month training program including obedience training (verbal and hand signals), exposure to social atmospheres, and sound response to doorbells (door-knock), smoke and fire alarms, alarm clocks, telephones and other vital sounds such as a crying baby.

All training is done through positive reinforcement, a system in which the dog is rewarded with food for a correct action or response. The food is gradually replaced by the dog owner's affection, providing another incentive.

Even after MacMunn's training regimen, there remains a lot of work to be done by the new owner.

"The deaf person must work as hard or even harder than the dog if the relationship is going to work," MacMunn says.

The prospective owner must come to the 90-acre farm in Jefferson and stay for a two-week period during which the dog's loyalties are transferred and the two come to trust, love, and respect each other.

For the first two days, the dog and master are literally hooked together by a special harness for 24 hours each day. MacMunn conducts two formal and several informal training sessions with the couple daily.

The deaf person eats, sleeps, plays, and works with his new companion under the watchful eye of MacMunn and a housemother who takes care of the facility.

The deaf person has a choice between several dogs at the facility, and MacMunn attempts to match the personalities of owner and dog.

"It's gotta be the right match," MacMunn says, explaining a very hyperactive dog wouldn't be a very smart choice for someone like Mrs. Sharp who is going to have a baby around the house.

The cost of training one of MacMunn's four-legged friends is \$3,000. MacMunn makes them available to the deaf for \$1,500, with \$150 paid by the new owner and \$1,300 from a social service sponsor such as a Kiwanis or Lions club.

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# Inventor says slow down joggers and try a weighted jump rope

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Grand Rapid, Mich. — One requirement of the fitness frenzy sweeping the nation is time — a commodity that always seems in short supply.

Many people who have become devotees of aerobics or jogging find themselves slipping out of the habit because they just can't find the time to slip on their Danskins or their Nikes.

But inventor Mike Mattox believes he has developed the answer — a weighted jump rope.

Mattox, a former college track star, said the exercise is ideal because it involves the entire body and stimulates the cardiovascular system in a short period of time.

His conditioning program for the weighted rope, marketed under the

"Heavyrope" trademark, peaks out at 26 minutes. But he says he knows of no one — including football star Walter Payton or basketball great Kareem Abdul Jabbar and Ralph Sampson — who has reached the top level of exercise prescribed in his conditioning program.

Average folk can take only a 15 minute workout, jumping for one minute and resting for a minute, he said. His studies indicate that a short amount of exercise is better for the body than miles of jogging or many, many minutes of aerobic exercises.

"There's nothing like it," Mattox said. "You could run for aerobic conditioning and then lift weights for anaerobic conditioning, but you'd still not be working the heart to get the oxygen and nutrients to the cells. This does it."

College and professional athletes who have worked with the weighted rope, which has been on the market since February, seem to agree.

Jabbar and Sampson were so impressed they invested in the company, joining a group of 15 current and former athletes who purchased the marketing rights to Heavyrope.

College coaches from Michigan State University to Boston College are purchasing the ropes by the dozen for their basketball and football players.

"I find it very beneficial in supplementing our weight program," says Dave Henry, strength coach for MSU football team. "It's particularly beneficial for cardiovascular endurance."

Basketball coach Ray McCahill, of Catholic Central High School in

Grand Rapids, Mich., did the unthinkable after working with the rope — he told his players to stop running wind sprints.

"I'll never have my team run wind sprints again," says McCahill, who claims at least two team members increased their vertical leap by five inches after working out with the rope.

But the move from the locker room into the living room has brought a warning from Bob Gadjia, an Illinois fitness expert who once held all the titles — Mr. USA, Mr. America and Mr. Universe. He said the Heavyrope is fine for athletes, but cautions beginners to make sure they are in shape before they begin swirling a six-pound rope.

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