

State and Local

Special dog guides blind student

Labrador provides 'eyes,' companionship

By Sarah Granberry
Reporter

Reveille's not the only dog who attends classes at Texas A&M. Danna, a yellow Labrador retriever, is a guide dog who leads her owner to and from classes safely.

"I got Danna this summer on May 24 in San Rafael, Calif. at Guide Dogs For the Blind Inc.," says Laura Ann Grymes, a sophomore elementary education major from Taft. "I've always been interested in having a dog guide, but I wanted to be sure that I could handle college before taking on the added responsibility of a dog."

Last year, Grymes used a white cane and her knowledge of the campus to get to class. She knew the textures of the sidewalks and the angles of the crosswalks, including where the cracks were.

"I still have to know those things," Grymes says. "I can't just tell Danna to take me to Harrington, I have to give her verbal left-right signals."

Danna, 2, hears her name and jumps on the bed with Grymes.

"Danna is a guide dog," she explains. "Guide Dog and Seeing Eye Dog are names of schools and training centers for these dogs. Dog guide is the generic term for dogs like Danna."

Grymes requested information from the Commission For the Blind and researched about nine of the dog-guide schools before making a choice.

"I picked Guide Dogs for the Blind because I liked the way they trained their dogs, the breeds of dogs they used, the more personal-type atmosphere and because they offer follow-ups to check on the dogs after a year," she says.

The school starts training the dogs when they're 18 months old, she says. After five months they are given to students, who are trained with the dogs for a month, she says.

But before students walk the dogs, they walk the instructors. For training purposes, Grymes walked an instructor, who wears a dog harness, for two days before she got her dog.

"I could hardly wait," Grymes says. "All I knew was they had matched me with a yellow Lab named Danna."

"They brought her in and I had to call her to me. At first, it was real hard for Danna to come because of the bond she'd built with her trainer, but once she came, things worked out great."

The trainers match the dog's personality and the student's per-

"We matched up perfectly. Danna can be almost as stubborn as I, but she's just as playful and friendly."

— Laura Ann Grymes,
Danna's owner

sonality as well as the student's technique and strength of commands, she says.

"We matched up perfectly," she says. "Danna can be almost as stubborn as I, but she's just as playful and friendly — aren't you, Danna?"

Danna's tail thumps the bed. The school didn't cost Grymes anything.

"The training, equipment and Danna were all free because the school works off of donations," she says.

Grymes and Danna live in Hobby Hall with their roommate, Tracy Wall, a junior secondary education major from Richardson.

Danna served as the vehicle for an out-of-the-ordinary first meeting between Grymes and Wall.

"The first thing I saw when I walked into my room was the dog," Wall says. "It was a surprise

to find out that Laura Ann is blind, but she's no different to live with than anyone else.

"Having Danna makes our room more homey. It makes me not miss my dog so much. She's very well-behaved."

Grymes says, "She's a very popular dog. People always seem to remember Danna's name more than mine — everyone says hello to Danna, and half the time I can't even tell who it was."

Grymes says she likes having the only dog on campus besides Reveille.

"Danna and Reveille are friends — finally," she says with a sigh. "The first time they met was in the Blocker Building. Danna, all of the sudden, started barking."

"Someone told me that she was barking at Reveille and that Reveille just looked at her like, 'How dare you bark at me. Don't you know who I am?'" Grymes says.

"I got really upset with Danna, not only because I was embarrassed, but because guide dogs aren't supposed to show any signs of aggression," she said. "If they do, they must be retired."

After a while, Danna became more behaved around Reveille, Grymes says.

David Oakland, a sophomore in the Corps of Cadets and this year's keeper of Reveille, says Reveille gets excited when she sees other dogs, but he was surprised when she barked at Danna.

"One day I just decided to introduce myself to her," Oakland says. "Danna and Reveille played a little bit, but I think that Danna felt a little funny playing because she knew she was supposed to be looking out for Laura."

Grymes says she was surprised when Oakland introduced himself — and Reveille.

"I was really excited about getting to play with Reveille," she says. "She's a lot smaller than I expected her to be."

Life at A&M is fun with Danna because the dog has given her



Photo by Sarah Granberry

Laura Ann Grymes' guide dog, Danna, leads her across campus.

more independence, Grymes says. She can go places alone at night and cross the streets with more confidence because of Danna's training, she says.

One of the few problems Grymes has had on campus is that people like to pet Danna while she's working.

"People fail to realize that she is a working dog who is trained to ignore everyone but me," Grymes says. "If she gets distracted and walks me out in front of a car, she could get us both killed."

"It's fine for someone to pet her if they ask first, because she should be sitting at my side and I

should be holding her by the leash instead of by the harness."

"When I go out with people, especially to nice restaurants, I let them decide whether or not Danna should come. Most people like to have her along, if only for the experience."

"I've even taken her to the (Texas) Hall of Fame with me, but I won't do it again because I hated leaving her at the table with all of the loud music and strange people. I felt really guilty, so now when I go dancing I leave her at home, where I know she'll be safe."

Appointees may become candidates

AUSTIN (AP) — Texans' ballot-box decision to return to an elected state Board of Education means the panel's 15 current members must decide whether to run for the seats to which they were appointed.

At least six have said they will or probably will run. Paul Dunn, a Levelland dentist who serves on the board, said Thursday he's definitely going to be on the ballot next year.

"I imagine it will be a real race," he said, predicting he would draw opponents from larger cities in his district, which includes Odessa, Lubbock and Amarillo.

The Dallas Morning News reported Thursday that board members Emmett Conrad of Dallas, Volly Bastine of Houston, Mary Helen Berlanga of Corpus Christi and Carolyn Crawford of Beaumont also said they would probably run. Geraldine Miller of Dallas was unavailable for comment Thursday, but other board members have said she has indicated a desire to run.

John Mack Prescott of College Station was among those who said they would not run.

"I don't care to go through the trouble and time and emotional expenditure of a political campaign for a position that has very little power and prestige, and from which one does not recover all personal expenses," he said.

Also listed by the Morning News as non-candidates were Charles Duncan of Houston, Maria Flood of El Paso, Rebecca Canning of Waco, William McBride of San Antonio, Katherine Raines of Cleburne and Jack Strong of Longview.

Board Chairman Jon Brumley of Fort Worth said he would not run. Pete Morales of Devine could not be reached for comment Thursday but has told other board members he probably would not seek election.

The board was changed on a temporary basis in 1984 from an elected to an appointed panel as part of the school reform act.

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.71	\$1175	.31	\$245
.70	\$895		
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.67	\$760		
.65	\$815		
.63	\$975	3.15	\$6300
.62	\$715	1.52	\$5275
.61	\$715	.83	\$1350
.60	\$895	.71	\$1495
.59	\$695	.46	\$375
.59	\$930		
.57	\$930		
.55	\$695		
.55	\$865	2.16	\$6295
.54	\$895	1.83	\$6300
.54	\$875	1.36	\$4900
.53	\$695	.74	\$1350
.53	\$795	.42	\$695
.52	\$495	.38	\$595
.51	\$845		
.50	\$795		
.50	\$695		
.49	\$650		
.48	\$650		
.42	\$695	2.30	\$4900
.41	\$650	.89	\$1775
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