

Kids Korner

Kids Pledge Puppies So Others Can See



Julie Noll of Perry County is raising a yellow lab named Iman.

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MIFFLINTOWN (Juniata Co.) — Every 4-Her knows about pledging his or her head, heart, hands and health. But members of the Future Loving Eyes 4-H Club take their service even further. They pledge their puppies so that others can "see."

The Future Loving Eyes puppy club includes 10 puppies being raised by about 30 people from 6 counties. The club members and their families met last week at the Messiah Lutheran Church in Mifflintown for their annual Christmas and Awards Banquet.

"I am so proud of what the kids have done," says club leader Kathy Queitzsch.

"The club has been in exis-

tence for 4-1/2 years and has raised more than 40 puppies."

The club began when Kathy, as Juniata County's 4-H Extension agent, asked local resident Jo-Anne Brooks to speak at a 4-H banquet about raising seeing eye puppies. Jo-Anne was a member of the original Puppies With A Purpose club in Lancaster County. Since then, Jo-Anne has raised 16 seeing eye puppies, one puppy at a time.

"This is my 16th dog," Jo-Anne says looking at a dog taking a snooze under the table. "Her name is K.C."

An occasional Yip! was one of the few reminders that there were dogs at this banquet. Family members took turns holding the end of the leash throughout the evening because



The Future Loving Eyes 4-H seeing eye puppy club has a purpose beyond petting puppies. The members are so service oriented, they won the Community Service Award at the Juniata County Leader Recognition Banquet in November.

puppies will be puppies and because the members were taught to handle these pups differently than they would a pet.

"The whole family has to agree to follow the rules before getting a seeing eye puppy," Kathy explains. "There is a whole notebook of instructions from The Seeing Eye — the puppy must be on a leash when outside; it must sleep on the floor beside the bed of the 4-H member; the dog is NOT taught to heel because it will be trained to pull; and members must consistently use certain commands such as sit down, rest (stay), come and sit, stand, forward, no, off, and quiet."

Just as puppies need to learn these rules, 4-H members and their families must clearly understand two important concepts before getting their own puppy—the puppy will never be theirs, and the puppy is destined for a very special purpose—to help a blind person gain independence, confidence, and dignity.

Because of health reasons or temperament problems, only about 70 to 75 percent of the puppies from volunteer families ever become guide dogs. After spending 16 to 18 months with a volunteer family, puppies return to the Seeing Eye school in New Jersey for formal dog guide training.

"Families can see their dog after formal training," Kathy explains. "The Seeing Eye invites them to New Jersey for a Town Walk. Families can watch their puppies guide an instructor through town showing all they have learned the previous four months. Families can see but not approach. It's a bitter-sweet moment. You can't touch the dog you once kept, but you're so proud of them."



In this puppy relay race, both the person and the puppy must sit before the next pair are allowed to run. Volunteer Seeing Eye families must expose puppies to new experiences — such as line dancing.



Jo-Anne Brooks (left) and the Future Loving Eyes Puppy Club thank Kathy Queitzsch for her leadership. The cake is decorated with Dalmations. Jean Swartz and Wendy Freet will conduct the club as Kathy retires by "hanging up her lead." Kathy received a Best Friend Award pin from The Seeing Eye for her dedication to the program.

Seeing Eye Puppy Facts

- The Seeing Eye is the oldest dog guide school in North America.
- The Seeing Eye puppies live with volunteer families in eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware.
- Volunteer families expose their puppies to a wide variety of daily experiences such as shopping in stores, walking among strangers, and crossing busy streets.
- The Seeing Eye pays for all veterinary bills and puppy food.
- Puppies spend about 18 months with their volunteer families.
- Puppies train at The Seeing Eye for four months before being matched with a blind person.
- The blind person and his or her dog train together for 20 to 27 days.
- Guide dogs "retire" after 10 years of service.