

## Dogs, their people gather at Woofstock

**By Booyeon Lee**  
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CARDIFF – Seven-year-old Jason Gackstetter and Marisa, his golden retriever mix, are a crowd-stopper wherever they go.

People stop, smile and say hello. Jason smiles back.

Until recently, Jason, who has cerebral palsy, was invisible to strangers and his classmates, said his father, Tim Gackstetter.

Before he got paired with a service dog, Jason was just a kid with a disability to some strangers. Now, Jason's the kid with the cool dog.

Marisa shakes people's hands, opens the door for Jason, picks up his toys when he drops them, and responds to about 35 other commands. Two years ago, Jason was paired with Marisa through a group called Canine Companions for Independence. The national nonprofit group breeds and trains dogs to assist people with disabilities.



LAURA EMBRY / Union-Tribune  
Hannah Lambert and her dachshund/terrier mix, Molly, got a ride in a wagon pulled by Kirby, who belongs to Hannah's aunt, Patty Patton of Santee. The family members attended Woofstock yesterday.

"Marisa makes him more sociable, and later when Jason grows up, she'll help him become more independent," his father said at an event presented by Canine Companions at MiraCosta College's San Elijo campus.

The fundraiser, called Woofstock 2005, showcased about 30 booths and drew nearly 450 people yesterday.

Most were volunteers or supporters of Canine Companions, but some dog owners, like Patty Patton of Santee, dropped by for the first time. She described the event as a "doggy Disneyland" where her 2-year-old Labrador retriever could enjoy a game of "Bob a Biscuit" and her 7-year-old niece could make crafts.

Last year, at the first Woofstock festival, the Oceanside-based regional chapter of Canine Companions raised \$11,000. It hopes yesterday's event raised \$20,000.

Canine Companion's Oceanside campus on Rancho Del Oro Road serves Arizona, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, California, Nevada and Hawaii. It breeds and trains about 100 dogs every year; 40 percent qualify to become service dogs. The rest are given away or donated to programs where the dogs help patients with physical therapy exercises or serve as an incentive for children in a classroom setting.

For example, there are several children with disabilities at California Avenue School in Vista who will not read to anyone but Ozzie, a Canine Companions dog, said Lee Anderson, the school's principal, who brought the Labrador mix to the festival yesterday.

The dogs that do graduate to become service dogs – after about three years of training – are matched with qualified applicants who can take home a golden retriever, a Labrador retriever or a mix of the two breeds for free.

Two years ago, when David Ball, 38, of Riverside received Hawk, a 3-year-old Labrador retriever mix, he had hardly left the house for four years. A spinal nerve disease triggered by a truck accident 17 years ago placed the former sheriff's deputy in a wheelchair in 2000.

"I was alone and life was really, really hard," he said.

Since Hawk came to live with him, Ball says the two leave the house nearly every day and they've put more than 42,000 miles on his van.

"Hawk gives me the confidence to go out," Ball said.

If the wheelchair slides away while he is trying get into it, Hawk brings it back. If a store counter is too high to handle comfortably, Hawk delivers the money.

Ball showed off Hawk's skills in a demonstration at the festival yesterday. Surrounded by a crowd of people, Hawk turned off a light switch at Ball's command, pulled his wheelchair, and picked up keys dropped on the ground and placed them on Ball's lap.

"You don't have to bribe him to do something for you. You just ask him and he'll do it, and he's happy with a 'Good boy,' " Ball said.

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