

Canine Companions gives the gift of canine love at Aug. 19 ceremony

SUZI CAMP

FOR THE NORTH COUNTY TIMES

OCEANSIDE — Fourteen years ago, Lavonne Gudmundsson was a successful elementary school principal. Then one fateful day, a terrible car accident put this Rancho Penasquitos resident in the growing group of spinal cord injury patients. Gudmundsson spent five years in bed, requiring four people to help her with even the most mundane daily routines.



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Then along came Canine Companions for Independence ... and Raymond. This beautiful golden dog became "my miracle," said Gudmundsson. "The companionship and love is healing." Gudmundsson lost 80 pounds, got her diabetes under control and gained strength — physical and emotional — that she never knew she had.

On Aug. 19, Canine Companions held a graduation ceremony at the Mission San Luis Rey in Oceanside, on a beautiful sunny day in San Diego County, and gave this great gift of canine love and assistance to nine wheelchair-using folks. The ceremony was held in the beautiful chapel.

Canine Companions is a free service funded through grants, fundraisers and donations. Dogs are trained to be companions, assist with daily tasks and alert

the hearing-impaired to important sounds. On this particular day, Disneyland cast members presented a \$50,000 check to Canine Companions, funded through cast members' recycling efforts at the Disneyland Resort. Disneyland provides recycling bins on all of their properties, and according to Disney representative Dan Mahin, "All resort trash is separated and recycled. This is a huge part of the Disney Company that a lot of folks aren't aware of."

Louise Copeland of Century 21 Award, was an underwriter for the 2006 graduation ceremony. Executive Director Linda Valliant welcomed guests, and Disney Ambassador Andrae Rivas and special guest Pluto made the Disneyland Resort presentation.

A team training video was shown by instructors Becky Skrudland, Simi Balter, and Becca Gordon; Puppy Program Manager Valerie Valentine spoke, and the 2006 class speaker was Cory Lynn Saldana who received her dog Ricky.

Southwest Region Board members for CCI are Jose Aponte, Robert Cartin, D.V.M., Adrienne Castaneda, Louise Copeland, Ryan Cunningham, Dale Feine, Jack Feller, Tim Gackstetter, Jack Hennings, Leslie Hennessy, Michael Hennessy, Tom Hollenstein, Cynthia Miley, Michael Stafford, Bob Street and Pegge Wilson.

PHOTOS BY SUZI CAMP



Linda Valliant and Thad, Andrae Rivas, Chuck Contreras and Pluto.



Lance Weir and Satine.



Cory Lynn Saldana and Ricky.



Jason and Tim Gackstetter with Marisa.