



Winter 2009 Issue: *The Southwest Tees it Up, WOOFSTOCK Rocks San Diego, Wake Up to A Good Dog Morning*

## Element of Surprise, Koontz Style

by Linda L. Valliant

The Dean, Gerda and Trixie Koontz Campus is a place where dreams are realized for scores of children and adults with disabilities every year. When each new team is presented on the graduation stage, emotions run high. The human-canine partnerships represent hope above all—hope for a life of increased independence, inclusion and personal fulfillment.



Dean and Gerda Koontz attended the November 2008 graduation ceremony with the newest member of the family, Anna Koontz, a CCI release dog. Photo courtesy of Ken Sergi. Visit [www.kensergi.com](http://www.kensergi.com) to purchase photos of CCI events.

Thanks to our campus benefactors, Dean and Gerda Koontz, another element was added to the November 2008 Graduation—suspense. International best-selling author, Dean, and his wife and business partner, Gerda, attended the ceremony to make a presentation and deliver a surprise from Trixie Koontz, dog.

Trixie, a retired CCI Service Dog who was adopted by the

*please see Koontz Style on page 9*

## Retired LAPD Officer Gets Help from a Hearing Dog



Hearing Team Connie Gupton and Homer IV graduated in March 2008.

Connie Gupton started her 20-year career with the Los Angeles Police Department when female officers were the exception. At that time, women were paid the same as their male counterparts on the police force, but they were not allowed to patrol neighborhoods, answer calls

*please see LAPD Officer on page 10*

## Director's Chair

by Linda L. Valliant



**H**appy New Year! Almost 60 days in, 2009 already holds claim to being a year of historic firsts. But we hold a wary eye on the year, fearing that some of the next historic events may be routed in economic horror.

I'm sure that my family, friends and colleagues are a lot like you and yours. Sometimes monitoring the news and trying to sort out all of the economic woes gets overwhelming. It would be great to have a little upbeat respite. Nix on that, we have to conserve and save and not think about entertainment splurges.

Well, I have a little secret to share

with you. I know of a special spot in San Diego's North County where you can fill your soul and lift your heart, and it will only cost you the price of gasoline. This amazing free venue delivers exquisitely crafted first run mini docudramas four times a year. There are three distinct features at every performance. The film makers and the subjects of these beautiful life vignettes mix and mingle with the audiences before and after the performance. The reception time features free homemade confections like Helen's own pumpkin chocolate chip cookies to further sweeten the deal.

Where is this mecca of delight, hope and inspiration? At CCI's quarterly graduation ceremonies! Graduations provide all of the above and so much more.

We know that many of you will have to change the amount or frequency of your donations this year. What a great opportunity it is to bring a friend to graduation and introduce them to this wonderful organization that has earned

your support. Then, when we come out of this economic mess, CCI will have more friends and that's always a good thing.

If distance makes it impossible to attend, here's another idea. Invite a few friends over for coffee and cookies (Helen might even share her famous recipe!) and we'll send you a DVD copy of the graduation ceremony to debut in your neighborhood. The next best thing to being there in person!

It is a tough year, but we are in this together and we will weather the economic storm. CCI Southwest currently has 295 active graduate teams, 63 dogs in Advanced Training, 209 active puppy raisers and 75 people going through the application process. We are determined to support all of our "exceptional dogs" and "exceptional people."

*Linda Valliant*

Thanks to Disabled Sports Eastern Sierra, Southwest Training Manager Todd Young and Advanced Training Dog Callender met with a group from the Wounded Warriors Disabled Sports Project at Mammoth Mountain. Their day included skiing, snowboarding, a lot of laughs and some much-appreciated puppy love!

Photo courtesy of Rebecca Garrett of Garrett Images.



*Dawn Ramsey  
Receives Geneva  
Davis Volunteer  
Leadership Award*

by Amber Sliffe

In November 1999, CCI Southwest started a tradition of awarding excellence in our volunteer community with the inception of the annual Geneva Davis Volunteer Leadership Award presentation at the November graduation ceremony.

The 2008 recipient of the Geneva Davis Award is Dawn Ramsey of Shawnee, Oklahoma. Dawn singlehandedly created Oklahoma's first CCI chapter, the Red Earth Champions. She remains dedicated to the chapter as she encourages new leadership and inspires volunteers to get involved. Her tenacity and ability to inspire others to volunteer for CCI made her an excellent choice to receive this year's award. CCI Southwest is pleased to recognize Dawn's many achievements and contributions.



2008 Geneva Davis Award recipient, Dawn Ramsey, is also a CCI graduate, shown here with Nero III.

**August Graduates**



**Stacy Alberson**  
Facility Dog, Omari II  
North Little Rock, AR  
*Fred Nickel*  
Estes Park, CO



**Enrique "Henry" Covarrubias**  
With Facilitators Alfredo & Eliana Covarrubias  
Skilled Companion Dog, Berrell  
Chula Vista, CA  
*Kathy & Rachel Colbath*  
Carlsbad, CA



**Mylissa Eckdahl**  
Service Dog, Santana  
Eagle, CO  
*Tamie Hunt*  
Austin, TX



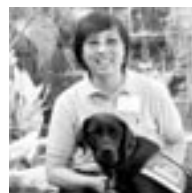
**Madison Forman**  
With Facilitator Bernadette Forman  
Skilled Companion Dog, Sapphire  
Scottsdale, AZ  
*Rob & Sharla Purnell*  
Yorba Linda, CO



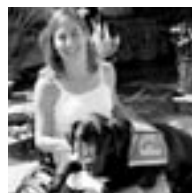
**Gabriel "Gabe" Groves**  
With Facilitator Mandalina Groves  
Skilled Companion Dog, Fenley  
Salt Lake City, UT  
*LeAnn Buchanan*  
San Diego, CA



**Cayla Jae-Hee Kim**  
With Facilitator Michelle Kim  
Skilled Companion Dog, Viva II  
La Cañada, CA  
*Tracee Lynn Weimeyer*  
San Diego, CA



**Christina Kimm**  
Successor Service Dog, Siva  
Glendale, CA  
*Terrri Stambaugh*  
Redondo Beach, CA

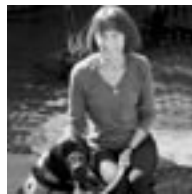


**Jennifer McCallson**  
Service Dog, Sudo  
Carlsbad, CA  
*Shawn Sullivan*  
Santee, CA



**Ron Young**  
Service Dog, Caelan  
Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA  
*Theresa Barnes*  
Laguna Niguel, CA

**November Graduates**



**Patty Giddings**  
Service Dog, Aberdeen  
San Diego, CA  
*Mary & Chris Keenan*  
Colorado Springs, CO



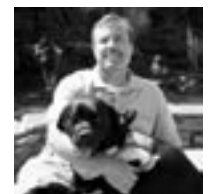
**Jason Gronwall**  
Service Dog, Whetu  
Sedona, AZ  
*Sharon Higgins*  
Phoenix, AZ



**Daniel Guillou**  
Service Dog, Cinnamon  
Oceanside, CA  
*NAVCON Brig*  
San Diego, CA



**Nico & Lisa Marcolongo**  
Facility Dog, Tali  
Solana Beach, CA  
*Laurie & Kristin Schmidt*  
Parker, CO



**Glenn McIntyre**  
Successor Service Dog, Zander  
Camarillo, CA  
*Ilana Rosen-Ducat*  
Cave Creek, AZ



**Joshua Olson**  
With Facilitators David & Debra Olson  
Skilled Companion Dog, Wickham  
Castle Rock, CO  
*Rochelle & Mike Mendonis*  
Garden Grove, CA



**Aaron Ruiz**  
With Facilitator Beverly Ruiz  
Skilled Companion Dog, Fergie  
Corpus Christi, TX  
*Virginia DeVilleneuve*  
Plano, TX



**Colyn Woods**  
With Facilitators Patty & Derrell Woods  
Skilled Companion Dog, Fina  
Hemet, CA  
*Jennifer & John Kachnic*  
Bailey, CO



**Wounded Warriors Battalion West—Camp Pendleton**  
Facility Dog, Jonah II  
MCB Camp Pendleton, CA  
*Karen & Stan Reaves*  
El Toro, CA

# Volunteer Highlights

## San Diego Champions

by Robin Galen Kilrain

Our annual holiday party, complete with grab-bag exchange and potluck meal, was, as always, a howling success. Sondra Thierdeman and husband Tom Sandler, who have years of experience as organizers of the festive event, led several deputized Champion elves in creating yet another merry holiday get-together. Southwest Region Executive Director Linda Valiant and Volunteer Coordinator Amber Sliffe were busy making sure all ran smoothly—except during the musical chairs-like gift exchange, which is supposed to be chaotic.

Partygoers socialized, enjoyed photos with Santa, and indulged in an amazing potpourri of potluck dishes. Then it was time for presents. Following the unwrapping came introductions—many folks identified themselves by which pup they were currently raising—and announcements of what booty had been behind the bows. This year, picture frames, cleverly inscribed note pads, and PediPaws nail-clipping tools dominated the fabulous mix of offerings for the two- and four-legged participants.



Santa visits with puppy in program, Delilah II, at the San Diego Champions holiday party.

Among all the bounty, however, one gift defied the suggested price limit. The vibrant bond of friendship that working with CCI generates? Priceless.

## Red Earth Chapter

by Dawn Ramsey

The Red Earth Champions ended 2008 with a successful Celebrity Waiter Gala and an awesome holiday party. Santa made sure that everyone



CCI volunteers cradle their puppies in program at the Celebrity Waiter Gala. From left, Virginia Devilleneuve and Trista III, Linda McMahan and Benisa, and Jackie Jelen and Houston IV.

had something to take home and a good time was had by all.

We are looking forward to an even better year in 2009! Though exact dates are not yet set, we're planning to attend the *Easter Mutt Strut* at Shawnee Mall. In the fall, we will have the next *Celebrity Waiter Gala* and we'll be at *Bark in the Park*, the kickoff event for the *Boo on Bell Street Festival*. Also, we're looking into holding a fundraiser at the outdoor amphitheater at the Sac and Fox Casino, though no formal plans have been made at this point.

In other news, Dawn Ramsey's Hearing Dog, Nero III, has retired and Dawn is now waiting to be invited to Team Training in Santa Rosa. Linda McMahan and her puppy in program, Benisa, started the New Year with puppy classes twice per week. Linda has also put her release dog, Delores III, to work—she started a dog reading program in her school. Congratulations, Linda!

## Utah Wasatch Champions

by Linda Weiskopf

The Wasatch Champions were pleased to host CCI's *A Good Dog Morning* event in Salt Lake City in early September. Thanks to Susan and Skip Daynes, who offered their lovely recital room for the event! It was well attended.

The night before the event, the Champions participated in an informative session with CCI staff that offered helpful ideas for our new chapter to consider. The biggest "aha" for many of us was to consider having volunteers who are "not holding a leash" at our events. We have already implemented that suggestion at several of our recent events and it has greatly reduced the stress on puppy raisers, letting them focus on the pups and provide proper handling. Thanks, CCI, for coming to visit!

This fall we welcomed five new puppies, and had four more matriculate in November and February. The cycle continues with the hope of two of our August Advanced Training dogs graduating in early February.

We were busy this fall with many



Puppies in program Connor IV and Cara II wonder about their outfits!

outreach events. We were able to educate more than 1,100 government employees on the benefits of contributing to CCI through the Combined Federal Campaign. Our small chapter visited the Social Security Administration, Veterans Administration, our local Lions Club, and managed several school presentations as well.

During the holiday season, Wasatch

Champion puppy raisers and volunteers wrapped many, many gifts at Barnes and Noble to benefit CCI. It was a profitable event as well as a joyous opportunity to spread the word about CCI.

Visit <http://wasatchchampions.blogspot.com> for great pictures and information about CCI events in Utah.

## Colorado Satellite Office

by Kelly Gorman

The year 2009 is off to a great start for CCI in Colorado! We have a strong group of puppy raisers and volunteers who are on board to help with some exciting upcoming events. We're planning the *Colorado-Wyoming Petroleum Marketers Association Annual Glen and Lynn*



Graduate Team Brent Baribeau and Phlox helped out at a holiday gift-wrapping event for CCI in Colorado.

*Ann Balenseifen Memorial Golf Tournament*, the *Good Times Car Show*, the *Journey to Independence* fundraising event, the *Summerfest Festival* and the *Holiday Gift Wrap*. As always, we will also count on our stellar volunteers to serve as great CCI ambassadors in their communities.

One group of volunteers doing an outstanding job for CCI is the inmates at the *Kit Carson Correctional Center (KCCC)* in Burlington, Colorado. The inmates worked hard to polish the skills of five puppies that matriculated in February. They now are preparing to welcome five new puppies, in addition to the five still in their care.

Southwest Instructor Becca Gordon visited Colorado in January for follow-up with seven graduate teams and interviews

with several applicants.

Mark your calendars! In September, the CCI Colorado Office will be offering a workshop for the Colorado puppy raisers.

Finally, our thanks go out to Joe Turcotte. In 2008, Joe completed six triathlons, including two *Ironman* competitions! His sponsorships raised over \$11,000 for CCI. Way to go, Joe!

## Valley of the Sun Chapter

by Cynthia Fox

The Valley of the Sun Volunteer Chapter ended 2008 with a fabulous volunteer appreciation party attended by over one hundred enthusiastic volunteers. The year was also capped off with chapter volunteers donating their time and expertise at several bookstores wrapping holiday gifts. Their efforts generated donations in excess of \$1,000. Beyond gift-wrapping, volunteers had countless opportunities to educate the public about CCI. This final fundraising effort brought our yearly total to over \$64,000 raised for CCI by our chapter!

The Valley of the Sun has also welcomed 13 new puppies in program and five first-time puppy raisers during the months of December and January.

As this year begins, our calendar is filling up. During the first quarter some of our activities will include a Challenge



Valley of the Sun Champions wrap gifts at Barnes & Noble to benefit CCI. Pictured (from left) are Linda Helms, Amy Marciniak, Ray Marciniak, Rita Aitken, Michaele Connors and Jackie Larsen. Their canine friends are Elvis III, Tahoe III and Venezia.

Air event, Ryan's Fun Run, Disability Exposition, Renaissance Faire and a visit to a veterinary urgent care facility for first-aid and CPR lessons for our puppies in program and graduate dogs. To continue our outreach efforts, Phoenix will host *A Good Dog Morning* on March 17. We are looking forward to a wonderful year!

## New Mexico Champions

by Buddy Hayes

The New Mexico Champions recently gathered to commemorate the matriculation of a special puppy in program named Elon, a very handsome yellow Lab. Three graduate teams and many puppy raisers with their puppies in program attended the gathering. We enjoyed great conversation and delicious food, including doggy cupcakes that looked just like a Lab's face!

The group was delighted to welcome Stan Sander with his new Hearing Dog, Tashi II. Stan explained how they have continued their training well after Team Training so that Tashi could become accustomed to the sounds in Stan's house. The team gave a great demonstration!

Another speaker was Gwen Walker, a Service Dog applicant who had just returned from her CCI interview in Oceanside. She is now a candidate on the waiting list. Gwen explained the application process, which was very interesting for the puppy raisers.

Everyone had a chance to visit and for some it was the first time to meet one another. It was a nice day for everyone and although Elon will be missed, we know he will be in good hands at CCI.

# Hundreds Attend BLISS TO YOU Event

**T**rixie Koontz, dog, channeled her third book, *Bliss To You—Trixie's Guide to A Happy Life*, to her dad's computer from the Other Side. On September 27, Dean Koontz traveled to CCI's Oceanside campus to sign copies of Trixie's new book. Dean addressed the gathered crowd with reflections on life with Trixie and answered fans' questions before getting comfortable at the signing table inside. Amazingly, Dean signed books, chatted with fans and posed for pictures, all with great good humor, for nearly seven straight hours. Over 500 people lined up to have their books signed and Dean did not disappoint a single one of them. All author's royalties from *Bliss To You* will be donated to The Trixie Fund to help dogs in need of catastrophic veterinary care.



Dean Koontz addresses the crowd at CCI before signing books.



Graduate Andrew Phillips and his parents enjoy the opportunity to get the best-selling author's autograph.



Hundreds of fans look on as Dean Koontz shares Trixie's stories at the *Bliss to You* event.

## Upcoming Events

**March 17**

A Good Dog Morning  
Marie Callender's #108  
Phoenix, AZ

**April 11**

WOOFSTOCK: A Festival for Dogs  
& People  
Balboa Park  
San Diego, CA

**April 23**

A Good Dog Morning  
Malaga Cove Library  
Palos Verdes, CA

**May 16**

CCI Graduation  
Mission San Luis Rey  
Oceanside, CA

**July 11**

CCI Salutes Independence  
Dean, Gerda & Trixie Koontz  
Campus Oceanside, CA

**July 24**

Enchanted Canines Golf Classic  
The Desert Greens Golf Course  
Albuquerque, NM

*For more information about these events,  
please call (760) 901-4308.*

## Wish List

### For the Campus:

- Bean bag chairs
- Easels for posters
- Free-standing magazine rack
- Small to medium rolling suitcase
- DVD player/recorder
- Television (at least 32")
- Area rugs with red and blue
- Everest & Jennings Rehab Shower Commode Chairs
- Potted silk trees for decoration
- Plastic play set with slide (large, for ages 3+)

### For Graduation:

- Five or six small floral arrangements for graduation brunch on May 16, 2009

*Thanks to all those who granted our wishes from the last newsletter! Joanne Beckwith, Hank Mahan, Sue Matloff and Dennis Sigler all generously donated.*

# Dog Show Shows Off CCI

CCI was proud to be invited back to the AKC-Eukanuba National Championship on December 13 and 14, 2008 in Long Beach, California.

As attendees entered the Convention Center, they passed the CCI booth where graduate teams, puppy raisers and staff handed out “people treats” and answered questions. Some graduates even got the chance to share how they work with their canine partners on a daily basis, as part of a special presentation called “Eukanuba Heroes.”



Service Team Tommy Hollenstein and Hiley gave a presentation at the AKC-Eukanuba National Championship.

Best of all, this year Eukanuba provided CCI with the opportunity to convey our mission to an even bigger audience: Graduate Team Glen Gregos and Beulah II were interviewed for a special segment in the Animal Planet broadcast of the dog show! It aired beginning on January 31, and CCI’s public service announcements were shown throughout the broadcast.

Thank you to our volunteers and graduates who made CCI’s presence at the event possible!

## Las Vegas Welcomes CCI’s Good Dogs



CCI is continuing our *A Good Dog Morning* informational breakfasts across the Southwest Region in 2009. We already visited Las Vegas, Nevada in January, and the community could not have been more welcoming!

Our meeting at the Red Rock Casino Resort & Spa was packed with more than 70 volunteers, graduate teams, donors and interested locals. CCI Southwest Region Executive Director, Linda Valliant; Development Associate, Annie Scott; and Instructor, Becca Gordon shared CCI stories with the crowd and challenged everyone to help spread the word in their communities. The presentation included videos, a question and answer session and lots of heartfelt stories. We hope the number of local CCI supporters grows as a result of the event!

Phoenix, Arizona will be the next stop on the *A Good Dog Morning* tour on March 17. On April 23, we’ll be in Palos Verdes, California. For more information, visit [www.cci.org](http://www.cci.org) or call (760) 901-4306 to request an invitation. See you there!

## Disney VoluntEARS Canine Care Center Dedicated

On November 15, the Disney VoluntEARS presented CCI with a \$15,000 donation on behalf of Disneyland Resort Cast Members, who raised the funds through the Disneyland Resort Backstage Recycling program. Immediately

following graduation, attendees gathered at CCI’s Dean, Gerda and Trixie Koontz Campus for the dedication of the “Disney VoluntEARS Canine Care Center.” The special facility houses dogs for approximately six months while they are in Advanced Training with CCI Instructors.



Pictured: Director of Community and Education Relations, Jill Bolton; puppy raiser and Disneyland Resort Cast Member, Colleen Gimpel; her puppy in program, Disney IV; and Disney Ambassador, David Gill celebrate the dedication of the Disney VoluntEARS Canine Care Center with Pluto and other Disney VoluntEARS.

# Trixie Gifts Spread the Love

Dean Koontz and his wife, Gerda, credit their retired CCI Service Dog, Trixie, with enriching their lives beyond anything they could have imagined.

Dean's desire to share Trixie's happy outlook with others led to three books—*Life is Good: Lessons in Joyful Living*, *Christmas is Good: Trixie Treats and Holiday Wisdom*, and *Bliss To You: Trixie's Guide to a Happy Life*.

Trixie's books spread the love—they celebrate the human-canine bond, teach readers the simple art of loving life, and benefit a great cause. Author's royalties from the books benefit CCI!

Now, Trixie's books—along with a

line of related accessories—are available for purchase at the CCI online gift shop at <http://www.cci.org>. Shop for the dog fancier in your life, your pampered pooch, or that “zen” friend who would enjoy a canine take on enlightenment. Order online now!

## Books:

<b>Life Is Good</b>	\$17.95
<b>Christmas Is Good</b>	\$9.95
<b>Bliss To You</b>	\$17.95

## Other Stuff:

Greeting cards (boxed set of 16)	\$19.95
Trixie dog lead	\$19.99
Trixie dog collar (small/large)	\$19.99
Trixie collar and lead combo	\$29.95



CCI puppy in program, Ilar II (AKA Lilly), models Trixie's *Dog Bliss You* collar and leash set.

## Southwest Staff Updates



CCI is proud to announce that Seamus Cashin (left) and Becky Miller (right) advanced from Apprentice Instructors II to Apprentice Instructors III. Their training skill and dedication to CCI's mission are to be commended. They are joined by a new CCI staff member, Melissa Nadeau (center), who now serves as the SWR Veterinary Technician. Welcome, Melissa!



Becca Gordon and Patti Irby are officially CCI Instructors! Both successfully completed the Apprentice Program, which included over three years of curriculum capped by rigorous practical and written exams. Congratulations, Becca and Patti!

## The Southwest is in Full Swing

Koontzes in 1996, immediately stole their hearts. Dean and Gerda credit Trixie with changing their lives as they learned to appreciate the joys of a leisurely stroll with Trixie or a meditative moment staring into her beautiful, dark eyes.

Trixie passed away in 2007, but not before she had established herself as a best-selling author with the publication of her poignantly wonderful and delightfully funny titles, *Life Is Good* and *Christmas Is Good*. Dean is quick to note that Trixie's first book outsold his first book 14 to one! Trixie now spends her days playing ball with the angels, but her prolific career is still in high gear. *Bliss To You* was published in 2008, and was followed by an array of "Trixie Stuff" including *Dog Bliss You* collars, leads and note cards. Dean shared with the graduation audience that more Trixie merchandise is forthcoming to include children's books, coloring books, sticker books and even a Trixie video game. "Trixie is casting a long shadow," said Dean as he explained that all proceeds from the Trixie industry were coming back to CCI as donations to The Trixie Fund.

The Trixie Fund was established by Dean and Gerda in 2004 to cover catastrophic veterinary charges for CCI

Golfers in the Southwest Region will be pleased to hear that 2009's special events will include four golf tournaments! Tee off with CCI in Vail, Colorado; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Phoenix, Arizona; and Carlsbad, California for some friendly competition to benefit CCI! All tournaments will include play on one of the Southwest's premiere golf courses, along with award parties, raffles, silent auctions and fabulous prizes! Details about the tournaments plus sponsorship and registration information can be found at <http://www.ccigolf.org>.



First, enjoy the beautiful city of Vail in June at the *Balenseifen Golf Tournament*. (Details will be announced shortly.)

The success of the Arizona tournament inspired last year's inaugural *Enchanted Canines Golf Classic* in New Mexico. This second annual event will be held on July 24 at the Desert Greens Golf Course in Albuquerque.

Head down to the desert for the sixth annual *Dog Days of Summer Golf Classic* in Arizona. This tournament gets bigger and better every year. The Ocotillo Golf Resort in Chandler will host the event on September 25.

Now, CCI golf is branching out to Southern California! In the last few weeks, scores of CCI supporters responded to the challenge of naming the first CCI San Diego County golf event. We're pleased to announce that a list of 19 finalists will share the prize! Join us on October 16 at The Crossings at Carlsbad for the *Canine Companions Invitational!*

working dogs and retired dogs living with people with disabilities. In 2008 alone, 71 different cases were financed by The Trixie Fund. For the recipients, the value of having the best medical care possible for their beloved companions is a gift beyond measure.

When Dean, with Gerda and Anna at his side, presented a check for a \$100,000 donation to The Trixie Fund the audience erupted in a joyful thunder of gratitude. Little did we know that this master of suspense was not quite through with the presentation. Dean said, "I wanted to surprise Linda once, so we have increased the check

to ONE MILLION dollars."

WOW! An awesomely extraordinary and moving moment that was the sweetest 'gotcha' I have ever experienced. I was totally overwhelmed with that million dollar moment as was everyone in the audience. We let our minds race to the amazing lives that have been changed through CCI's program and the many more that will be touched because of the Koontzes' extraordinary philanthropy. CCI dogs reach their human partners on levels that sometimes defy our senses and create miracles for them. Future miracles found their embers in the presentation of that \$1,000,000 check and our hearts filled with joyful gratitude for Dean, Gerda and Trixie Koontz. The family has now donated in excess of \$5.5 million to CCI!



Gerda Koontz cut the ribbon for the unveiling of the *Leaves of Love* sculpture recognizing CCI's loyal donors at the November 2008 graduation ceremony. Photo courtesy of Ken Sergi. Visit [www.kensergi.com](http://www.kensergi.com) to purchase photos of CCI events.

# In His Own Words

by Tim Gackstetter

**W**e were strolling through the exhibits at the Del Mar Fair when Jason was four years old and saw the CCI booth. The concept of a companion dog immediately clicked with us—especially a highly-trained dog. The minute Jason turned five, the minimum age to apply, we called CCI.

CCI matched Jason with Marisa, a Lab and Retriever mix. We knew right away he had a new best friend. What we didn't know were all of the other magical things she would do for him as his partner.

When out in public, what used to be an easy to ignore boy in a wheelchair instantly became someone to give a smile to and share dog stories with. Strangers now have no hesitation telling Jason what a nice dog he has and asking her name. The social bridge is so amazing that on trips through the airport with Marisa



Southwest Region Board President, Tim Gackstetter, has a CCI dog in the family! Tim is pictured here with his son, Jason, and Skilled Companion Dog, Marisa.

and Jason, the TSA agents never fail to give them big smiles and fight over who gets to “pat down” Marisa. What other magician could get every security agent to give you a smile?

At the beginning of each school year, Jason's mom gives a short talk to Jason's new class about Marisa and why Jason

has her. At first, the kids are not sure what to make of a kid in a wheelchair. Once they meet his cool dog, though, the barriers come down and Jason is soon one of the most sought-after kids on the playground. Since Jason is under 18 and not the official dog handler, Marisa does not stay with him during the school day, but that doesn't matter. She has already worked her magic and, wheels or no, Jason is now a cool guy in his classmates' eyes.

It is not possible to put into words the tremendous impact these dogs have on their partners' lives. This is all thanks to the incredible CCI staff, volunteers and supporters. Attend a CCI graduation and see for yourself how people's lives are literally changed right before your eyes. While you're there, look for Jason and Marisa, and share a big smile and a piece of the magic.

---

## LAPD Officer

*continued from page 1*

or pursue suspects. The policy finally changed a few years into Connie's career. When it did, Connie began an assignment patrolling the south end of Los Angeles. She was the first woman on the LAPD ever to do it!

This was one of many changes Connie saw in the LAPD during her long career. Another landmark change happened when it became a requirement to wear ear-protection at shooting ranges during practice. However, by that time it was too late. Connie's hearing was already permanently damaged.

Now, Connie is retired and living in a senior community in Palm Desert, California. There, she met a puppy raiser, who introduced her to CCI. Not long after, Connie introduced that same puppy raiser to her new best friend and 24/7 helper, Hearing Dog Homer IV.

“My life has definitely changed for the better since receiving Homer,” Connie says. In addition to alerting her to doorbells, phone calls and the oven timer going off, Homer lets Connie know when someone is trying to get her attention. “When a person is hearing-impaired, they look like everyone else,” Connie explains. “If someone speaks to you and you don't answer, they think you're being rude.” With Homer by her side, Connie knows this won't happen again.

Connie is one of many seniors who benefit from CCI assistance dogs. **With the help of a grant from the Carlsbad-based Gary and Mary West Foundation, CCI launched the Senior Initiative to increase placements of assistance dogs with seniors and senior-serving organizations.** CCI places dogs with individual seniors as well as professionals and volunteers who work with seniors in rehabilitation, therapeutic, and assisted living facilities. Dogs are trained to serve clients with a wide range of physical disabilities including spinal cord injury, brain trauma, hearing impairment, and multiple sclerosis. If you or someone you know could benefit from a CCI assistance dog, call 1-800-572-BARK or visit [www.cci.org](http://www.cci.org).

JOURNEY TO INDEPENDENCE  
HOLLYWOOD  
OCTOBER 4, 2008





Post Office Box 4568, Oceanside, CA 92052  
(760) 901-4300

www.cci.org

Nonprofit Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit #455  
San Diego, CA

**Mission statement:** CCI is a nonprofit organization that enhances the lives of people with disabilities by providing highly trained assistance dogs and ongoing support to ensure quality partnerships.

Get your groove on!

A Festival for Dogs & People

# Woofstock



Saturday, April 11, 2009, Balboa Park, San Diego

**Celebrate** the 40th anniversary of Woodstock with your pooch to '60s tunes provided by 105.7 FM The Walrus! Festival features flyball, Disc Dogs, a K9 playground, silent auction and great shopping, contests and more! Meet Jon Provost, the actor who played Timmy in the classic TV series, *Lassie*! Easy Walk n' Roll Fun Dog Walk precedes the festival to raise funds for CCI. Register online. [www.cci.org/woofstock](http://www.cci.org/woofstock)

General admission is \$5  Walk registration is \$35/adult, \$15/child, \$60/family

Registration includes event tee shirt, festival admission and SWAG bag.

Call Annie Scott at (760) 901-4306 for sponsorship and vendor information.

**Regional Board**  
Tim Gackstetter, *President*  
Robert Cartin  
Adrienne Castaneda  
Louise Copeland  
Dale Feine  
Jack Feller  
Leslie Hennessy  
Michael Hennessy  
Tom Hollenstein  
Cynthia Miley  
George "Jeep" Rice  
Mike Stafford  
Bob Street  
Margaret "Pegge" Wilson

**Regional Staff**  
Annie Scott, *Editor*  
Precision Assembly, *Distribution*  
Komin Design, *Layout*

*The Companion* is published three times a year for distribution to CCI supporters, volunteers and Graduates. ©2009 Canine Companions for Independence, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in USA. Canine Companions for Independence,® its logo, and Exceptional Dogs for Exceptional People® are trademarks of Canine Companions for Independence, Inc.

