

Providence Profile: Eaton the Therapy Dog and His Handler, Emerson



JBB Director Tom McQuillan greets Emerson Davis and Eaton for their weekly visit.

Rarely do you hear him enter a room, but when the participants at Jean Bradbury first see Eaton, a positive energy fills the space and broad smiles cover nearly every face. Eaton, a three year old Golden Lab, has the poise of a much older dog and the sweet disposition that make these dogs among the most popular breeds for families. Once a week, he and his owner Emerson Davis come to JBB and visit with the participants, providing a therapeutic exchange for this certified therapy dog.

Eaton's visits started last November as a way to let Eaton continue his work and serve despite his severe food allergies that prevented him from being a certified service dog, a job he trained two years to do. The allergies create additional care needs for Eaton and increased costs to feeding him and medications. Davis, who fostered Eaton during his training, was given the option of adopting him permanently, which he readily did. The two then began their journey together and brought them to their work of brightening days and building bonds with those at Providence Center.

Each morning of work is the same – Eaton patiently and proudly waits as Davis puts his therapy dog vest on and they jump in the car to Shore Acres Road in Arnold. Eaton is patient and doesn't get distracted from noises from the cars and people. He listens attentively to Emerson's commands and is a calm, cool presence.

That's Providence Center will feature participants, staff, employers, or people in the community that inspire and empower us. Nominate the person you think is helping Providence Center advance its mission and tell us why you think they should be featured in our Providence Profile. Send your nomination to Audra Harrison, Director of Community Relations, at aharrison@providencecenter.com.

JBB Director Tom McQuillan jumped at the chance to offer pet therapy to participants there. "The joy an animal creates in people is a great thing to experience for so many of our men and women. Dogs in general, and Eaton in particular, can speak to people sometimes better than people can. Eaton engages participants. They light up when they see him and you almost literally see any tensions melt away when they can have Eaton put his nose on their laps and pet him."

"By being petted or hugged, Eaton, as a therapy dog, has a way to reach into the inner soul of people and assist with their physical and mental wellbeing," Davis says of Eaton's work. "You can readily see the smiles, comfort and joy he brings to people as he interacts with them."

From their first visit, Davis and Eaton fit in well among the nearly 100 participants at JBB. Each time that they come, they go through the building to greet people in each program space. Ever polite and demonstrating his superior training, Eaton waits to be approached to keep from frightening those who may be afraid of dogs or simply tentative.

"Because of his background, his training, and his gentle demeanor, we knew he could bring a lot of joy and comfort to many people," Davis explained. Because of his years of training, Eaton knows about forty-five commands.

The team is certified by Therapy Dogs International, a New Jersey based volunteer organization that tests and registers therapy dogs throughout the United States and Canada. Therapy dogs are used in a wide variety of groups and situations, including hospitals, schools, disaster areas and shelters. They provide companionship and have the effect of relieving stress, lowering blood pressure and raising the mood of those they help. Simply patting dogs releases chemicals in the brain that cause feelings of happiness and bonding.

Davis is the former Assistant Chief of Police for the Anne Arundel County Police Department. He retired after 35 years in the fall of 2012. "My volunteer work with Eaton allows me to work with people in need and especially with people with disabilities," he said. Those with disabilities are special in his heart as Davis had a brother, John, with Down's syndrome who passed away in 2010. He credits John for inspiring him to continue to serve and focus their work on those with disabilities.

In addition to their work at Providence Center, they also visit the Kennedy Krieger Institute, Anne Arundel Medical Center and St. Anne's School of Annapolis.

