Service Dog Grant

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A WKU faculty member who suffers from Multiple Sclerosis has received a grant to support her Service Dog Awareness program.

It’s a lesson on service dog etiquette as Amy Bingham explains in this week’s View from the Hill.

Service dogs provide invaluable support for people with disabilities. That’s certainly the case for Dr. Darbi Haynes-Lawrence who was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in 2009 and then three years ago nearly lost her ability to walk.

“You’re a good boy aren’t you?

This is Jaeger.

“He’s a terribly smart dog.”

“He seems to understand more about what’s happening to me than I do.”

What’s happening to Dr. Darbi Haynes-Lawrence is Multiple Sclerosis, an attack on her nervous system she never saw coming.

“I ran marathons, I was a college athlete.”

“Got home one day and couldn’t get out of the car. One side of me wouldn’t move. “

A few years after her initial diagnosis a relapse rendered her unable to walk for four months, that’s when she started thinking about a service dog.

“ How do service dogs work? How do you know you need one? I don’t walk well, I’m sometimes in a wheelchair sometimes not.”

Now a key part of the family, Jaeger plays an important part in Dr. Darbi’s ability to continue teaching in the classroom.

“The students were fabulous in helping me train him to pass out papers, collect pencils in his basket and things like that.”

Jaeger received such a reaction when out in public, Haynes Lawrence realized an awareness program for elementary students would help educate the public.

“Don’t touch Jaeger, don’t talk to Jaeger, you can ask me questions but don’t distract him.”

It’s a message she distributed on pencils but thanks to a recent grant students will now get t-shirts.

“Go to bed”

They’ve shared an undeniable bond from the beginning…

“he laid at my feet, head on my foot and I was in love, just in love.”

And he helps her with simple tasks we all take for granted.

“he can get things out of the refrigerator, he can bring me a blanket.”

But Jaeger is also helping spread the message that service dogs have a job to do.

“During the class while he’s working, while we’re working, nobody can touch him or talk to him and they’re really great about that.”

The nearly five thousand dollar grant is the fourth grant from the Jessie Ball DuPont Fund WKU has received over the last ten years.

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.

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