

More letters to the editor:

Appreciate hospitality shown by AB

To the editor:

The first week of December 2008, my family experienced the hospitality of Atlantic Beach and its citizens in a big way. My 29-year-old daughter, Melanie, a wheelchair user, was to be at the Orlando campus of Canine Companions for Independence (CCI) on December 4 for a one-year follow-up recertification testing with her skilled service dog, a beautiful 3-year-old black Lab named Madine. The dogs and people of CCI are the most amazing help to people with disabilities, and there was no cost to us other than the trips to Florida from our home in Mississippi. CCI uses volunteer puppy raisers to nurture, train and socialize the dogs from age 2 months to 14 months, when they must turn the dogs in to the training center and not see them again until they are placed with new owners almost a year later. Few dogs have the temperament and skills to become skilled service dogs, and a majority of CCI pups become skilled companion dogs (handled by a third party for the disabled person rather than by the disabled person) or go out of the program on "COC" (change of career) to search and rescue, drug enforcement, seeing eye or other services.

Madine was lucky enough to be the first CCI pup raised by Dr. Moody McCall, his wife Eugenia, and sons Chase and Clark, of Atlantic Beach. They did an outstanding job of socializing her to all situations (even flying to Utah for a ski trip with the fami-

ly!), and as a result she is what the CCI trainers called a "bomb-proof" dog, startled by nothing and calm in all situations. Exactly what Melanie needs. Dr. McCall, a veterinarian and owner of San Pablo Animal Hospital, is currently raising his third CCI puppy, and both his first two were placed as skilled service dogs, an astounding percentage. At the placement ceremony in November 2007, Melanie established a wonderful friendship with Moody, and the two have kept in touch about all Madine's accomplishments for Melanie as her new owner. The McCalls invited us to spend a night with them on our way to CCI this month, and the time with them (including the stroll through beautiful downtown Atlantic Beach and through their neighborhood to the beach) made our trip.

And about that stroll to the beach ... after our arrival on Tuesday, December 2, we walked with the McCalls to the beach at 7th Street. Melanie has not been on the beach since she was in elementary school, because wheelchairs and beach sand just don't get along! But the foresight and generosity of the leaders of Atlantic Beach changed that for her. Dr. McCall had obtained one of the city's two new surf wheelchairs for her use, and we left her power chair at the end of 7th Street and easily pushed her down the beach for a long walk. Madine even got to run through the surf with Moody as they once did - both smiling the whole

time. At the end of the beach stroll, we walked around the lovely shops of downtown and back to 7th Street. Immediately upon seeing Melanie's wheelchair sitting at the end of the street at sand's edge, we panicked. I had absent-mindedly left her leather jacket and back-pack, with all her medications and other essentials for the week's trip, on her chair - and they were all gone. But as we went back to the cars a few blocks away, Moody calmly called the AB Police Department and was told that, yes, someone had called and told them he had found those items and had retrieved them. With a great sigh of relief, we drove a few blocks to the home of Joseph Lambert and exchanged expressions of thanks for the rescued coat and back-pack. He told us of his fear that something tragic may have happened to the owner of the wheelchair, and of his concern that the personal property might be seen and taken by some transients who had recently been in the area. He likely saved us from our own negligence in leaving those things unattended, and we are mightily grateful to Mr. Lambert for his good citizenship.

So, to Dr. Moody McCall and family, Mr. Joseph Lambert, the administration of Atlantic Beach, and all the good folk there, we are thankful for your hospitality and protection while in your beautiful city. It is a beautiful place of which we have wonderful memories. Thank you.

**Richard A. Courtney
Fracogna Courtney
Jackson, Mississippi**

