



CANINE IN TRAINING: Kuley, an 18-week old puppy in training for the Canine Companions for Independence Program, shakes hands with trainer, Marietta Birdsell.

Ann Spann | Crestview News Bulletin

UPCOMING: 'Angels with tails' trained locally

Area volunteers raise companion dogs

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Brian Hughes | Crestview News Bulletin

A companion dog for a person with disabilities has to display lots of patience and affection. The dog also requires lots of training, which means someone had to display lots of patience and affection for the companion-in-training.

That process begins with volunteers with Canine Companions for Independence and the puppies they raise prior to the dogs' advanced training at a CCI facility. Locally, members of the Emerald Coast Volunteer Chapter begin their part when the companion dogs are just puppies.

The group supports puppy socialization efforts for puppy raising programs at Bay Correctional Facility and Gadsden Correctional Facility, explained volunteer Marietta Birdsell.

Currently Birdsell is raising Kuley, a bouncing bundle of energy. Kuley was placed with her when he was just a few weeks old and will be in her care until he reaches about 14 months.

Kuley is the seventh puppy Birdsell has raised for CCI.

"It's a full-time job," Birdsell laughed. "The first few months are very time intensive."

CCI volunteers hold monthly meetings the fourth Wednesday of each month at Covenant Hospice. It's not unusual to see a couple pooches attend the meetings. After all, learning to socialize with humans is part of the training.

Read the full story in an upcoming edition of the Crestview News Bulletin.