

# Hospital adds new assistance dog

Philadelphia resident Stacy Cook recently received an assistance dog from Canine Companions for Independence (CCI), a non-profit organization that breeds, trains and places assistance dog for people with disabilities. She received her certification in public and facility.

Cook was matched with a facility dog named Ayla, a two-year old yellow Golden Retriever, who responds to approximately 50 commands.

Ayla will partner with Cook at Neshoba County General Hospital - Nursing Home where Cook is employed as the activity director for the Senior Life and Swing Bed Unit. Facility dogs are expertly trained dogs that partner with a facilitator and can aid patients in medical rehabilitation.

Evidence suggests that animal-assisted therapy can have a positive effect on a patient's psychosocial, emotional and physical well being. One of the most valued qualities of a facility dog is the unconditional love and attention it gives to clients and patients with whom it interacts. Facilitators, such as Cook, are working professionals responsible for handling and caring for

the facility dogs.

Cook and Ayla recently completed team training, a rigorous training session at CCI's Southeast Regional Center in Orlando, Florida. During training, Cook learned all of Ayla's commands and how to properly care for her. Team training is an essential part of CCI's program because it gives the recipient an opportunity to learn how to work with and benefit from an assistance dog.

The training also consisted of daily lectures, exams, public outings and taught the recipient how to train and implement this into treatment plans for patients who will benefit from a canine companion working with them to meet goals.

The process begins with CCI's breeding program in Santa Rosa, Calif. When the puppies are eight weeks old they are placed with volunteer puppy raisers across the country who will teach them up to 30 basic commands.

When the puppy is 14 to 16 months old, the puppy raiser returns the dog to one of CCI's regional training centers for six months to a year of advanced training.

For more information on pet



Stacy Cook and Ayla

therapy and patient aid with assisted dogs contact, Penny Rogers, Director of Rehabilitation

at 601-663-1276 or Ray McNair, director of Senior Life at 601-663-1425.

