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## **Quadriplegic Artist Inspires Children with Disabilities** ***ART OF INDEPENDENCE Event to Feature Tommy Hollenstein***

OCEANSIDE, CA Tommy Hollenstein did not let a spinal cord injury prevent him from pursuing his dream of becoming an artist. On May 22, Tommy will team up with Canine Companions for Independence and the Downtown Disney District in Anaheim to show children with disabilities that dreams can come true despite physical challenges. *Canine Companions is a nonprofit organization that enhances the lives of people with disabilities by providing highly trained assistance dogs and ongoing support to ensure quality partnerships.* Tommy will present an interactive demonstration of how he paints at the ART OF INDEPENDENCE on Saturday, May 22, from NOON to 4PM in front of ESPN Zone in Downtown Disney.

Tommy, a Canoga Park resident, received his first service dog, Weaver, from Canine Companions for Independence in 1989. Weaver improved Tommy's quality of life immensely, and taught him to live his life to the fullest no matter what obstacles he encountered. As Weaver aged, Tommy decided to immortalize his best friend in a unique way. He had his dog walk across a wooden board with paint-covered paws.

Around the same time, Tommy developed a unique method of his own to apply vividly colored paint to create original artwork. Rather than the traditionally handheld paintbrush, Tommy started using the tires of his wheelchair to paint. The result was layers of bright, fluid, weightless color. Always a creative person, getting into painting gave Tommy immense satisfaction and filled him with joy and passion. These emotions are evident in Tommy's now vast collection of work.

Years later, Tommy is a successful, world-renowned artist who counts many celebrities as collectors of his paintings. He also received a successor service dog, Hiley, from Canine Companions. She occasionally lends her paw prints to Tommy's works like Weaver did. As a tribute to Weaver, Tommy now donates 10% of the proceeds from his paintings to Canine Companions.

"Tommy is an inspiration," explains Linda Valliant, the Executive Director of Canine Companions' Southwest Region Center. "We wanted to provide the children in our program, who are facing physical challenges of their own, the opportunity to meet and learn from such an incredible role model. Tommy embodies the notion that anything is possible."

The public is welcome to see Tommy's demonstration at the ART OF INDEPENDENCE, which will be accompanied by a presentation on Canine Companions. Canine Companions Instructor Becky Miller will explain how the organization provides assistance dogs free of charge. With the help of a dog in its final stages of training, Becky will demonstrate some of the commands the dogs learn to help people with disabilities accomplish practical tasks. In addition to the children in the Canine Companions program who are participating in Tommy's interactive painting demonstration, some Downtown Disney guests may be invited to paint as well. Commemorative tee shirts will be sold to benefit Canine Companions, including a limited edition of one-of-a-kind shirts that are custom painted by Tommy.

**About the ART OF INDEPENDENCE:**

For more information, visit [www.cci.org/tommy](http://www.cci.org/tommy) or call (760) 901-4307.

**About Canine Companions for Independence:**

Canine Companions for Independence provides highly-trained assistance dogs to children and adults with disabilities. Established in 1975, Canine Companions has five regional training centers across the country. Canine Companions is recognized worldwide for the excellence of its dogs, and the quality and longevity of the matches it makes between dogs and people. There is no charge for the dog, training and ongoing follow-up services. For more information, visit [www.cci.org](http://www.cci.org) or call 1-800-572-BARK.

**About the Downtown Disney District:**

A lush garden oasis during the day and an energizing entertainment district at night, Downtown Disney is the high-energy place for Southern California locals. Guests can experience a great variety of shopping, dining and entertainment. Downtown Disney is located next to the Disney theme parks at 1580 S Disneyland Dr. Anaheim, CA 92802-2294. For more information, visit [www.DowntownDisney.com/anaheim](http://www.DowntownDisney.com/anaheim).

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