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Canine Companions for Independence Expands in Los Angeles ***Assistance Dog Organization to Serve More Local Clients with Disabilities***

OCEANSIDE, CA Canine Companions for Independence has opened a field office in Los Angeles at 2312 Westwood Boulevard, thanks to a generous grant from the Shirley McKernan Courage Foundation. *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.* The new office will allow Canine Companions to better serve local clients including wounded war veterans. It is critical to Canine Companions' goal of placing more assistance dogs in Los Angeles County.

Canine Companions assistance dogs are trained to help people age five and older with a variety of physical and developmental disabilities. Children and adults with limited mobility receive help with practical tasks from their assistance dogs, who are trained to help retrieve dropped objects, pull manual wheelchairs and open doors. People who are deaf or hard of hearing use hearing dogs to alert them to smoke alarms, doorbells and kitchen timers. Canine Companions assistance dogs also provide immeasurable emotional support to their human partners, especially to children who often experience social isolation because of their disabilities. As part of its Wounded Veterans Initiative, Canine Companions provides assistance dogs to veterans with disabilities. For veterans making a new start putting their lives back together after an injury, an assistance dog can provide the help they need to regain independence.

Currently, there are 24 Canine Companions assistance dogs working in Los Angeles county. One example is Service Dog Echuka, who helps Redondo Beach resident Peter Morgan. Peter, who has spina bifida, relies on Echuka for tasks that would cause Peter great pain if he had to accomplish them on his own. Echuka opens doors and frequently picks up items Peter drops. Peter is a special education teacher, and Echuka is helpful in the classroom, as well. It is much easier to motivate students when the reward is snuggling with Echuka!

Established in 1975, Canine Companions is celebrating its 35th birthday this year. The organization expects to place its 3,500th assistance dog in 2010. "Canine Companions for Independence is growing every year," explains Canine Companions Southwest Region Executive Director Linda Valliant. "The opening of our Los Angeles field office will help us expand further. We look forward to serving more Los Angeles residents with disabilities, and we appreciate the support of the Los Angeles community in this effort."

Volunteer opportunities are available for Canine Companions including puppy raising, outreach assistance and administrative tasks in the Westwood office. Canine Companions relies on donor support to provide assistance dogs, their training and ongoing follow-up support completely free of charge to its clients. Call (310) 446-5700 or visit www.cci.org to learn more.

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 now 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. For more information, visit www.cci.org or call 1 (800) 572-2275.

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