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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SERVICE DOG ORGANIZATION GRADUATES LARGEST CLASS EVER

23 People to Receive Assistance Dogs on August 22

OCEANSIDE, CA Canine Companions for Independence, the nonprofit organization that provides assistance dogs for people with disabilities completely free of charge, will hold its largest-ever southwest regional graduation ceremony on Saturday, August 22, 2009. The event will be held at the Mission San Luis Rey Parish's Serra Center (4070 Mission Avenue in Oceanside) at NOON. Open to the public with free admission, this inspiring ceremony will honor the 23 newest recipients of Canine Companions' highly-trained assistance dogs.

Both adults and children with a wide range of physical and developmental disabilities benefit from these canine helpers, and representatives of Canine Companions' diverse clientele are among the August graduating class. In recent years, the organization began a targeted effort to increase placements of assistance dogs with disabled veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan. Canine Companions is proud to announce that two local Marines and one Army soldier that served in Operation Iraqi Freedom will formally receive their service dogs in the August ceremony.

The dogs graduating August 22 have been in training for over two years and know up to 50 different commands including opening doors, turning lights on and off, and retrieving dropped objects. The graduation ceremony is the culmination of an intensive, two-week Team Training course completed by these new human/canine teams at Canine Companions' Southwest Regional Training Center in Oceanside.

The ceremony will also feature volunteer puppy raisers turning in the puppies they have been raising for Canine Companions over the past 14 to 16 months. Next, the puppies will embark on six to nine months of Professional Training with staff instructors in the hopes that they will one day become an assistance dog for someone in need.

About Canine Companions for Independence:

Canine Companions for Independence provides highly-trained assistance dogs to children and adults with disabilities. Established in 1975, CCI now has five regional training centers across the country. CCI 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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Photo: Canine Companions' May 2009 graduate teams