

On the Positive Side: New Resident An Asset

J. L. Jones and Frank Bryce

January 27, 2012

Many of us know and understand what a therapy dog is but recently there was an opportunity to meet Lola, a new resident to Las Cruces, who in spite of her difficult start in life is contributing to the health and well being of residents of our area. In her own words J.L. Jones, Lola's guardian, introduced us to Lola:

"A four year old, 60 pound canine, who thinks she is a lap dog, Lola was picked up as a stray in South Central Los Angeles and rescued on her last day at the shelter. We suspect that she was used for breeding and then dumped. Once out of the shelter, things did not necessarily improve for her as she was diagnosed with Canine Parvovirus, often referred to as "parvo". Dogs that contract parvo have about a 10% survival rate. However nothing can keep this girl down, and she fought and won her battle against the deadly disease. Adopted by her foster mother, Lola became a therapy dog and used by a trainer for temperament testing of other dogs. Now in Las Cruces, Lola is a therapy dog with TheraPaws. She and her owner/handler visit hospitals and nursing homes visiting patients/residents lifting their spirits. Over the past 2 years Lola has comfortably shared her home with about 30 foster dogs ranging from little terriers to giant Dobermans. Lola currently lives with a cat and a foster Chihuahua. Lola loves everyone she meets and adores children; she would often sleep in the same bed as her "niece and nephew". Lola is an ambassador for her breed, the American Pit Bull Terrier (APBT)."

J. L. goes on to say "It is important for pit bulls like Lola to go out and help to re-educate the public on her breed, as the news never reports any positive press about these dogs. In 2006 the American Temperament Test Association shows that 84.1% of the APBT pass the temperament test, which is higher than the Golden Retriever (83.8%). For more information on breed statistic, please visit <http://atts.org/breed-statistics/statistics-page1>"

A little research about therapy dogs reveals how important they are to help people combat loneliness and depression, entertain the folks they are visiting, help them forget their ailments and pain to some degree, and even encourage additional use of hands and arms along with stretching and turning. Terms now used regularly are "Animal Assisted Therapy", "Animal Assisted Activities" and sometimes "Visiting Dog." The therapy dog/visiting dog opens opportunities for conversation with relative strangers when first meeting and offers a companion who pays little or no attention to whether you are young or old or other problems you may face.

The criteria for a therapy dog is no little consequence as they must be social, polite, and maintain a delicate balance between being friendly and calm. The dog must be comfortable with the environment, the situation, the required behavior and make the person being visited feel accepted. This is not an easy assignment for most of us but many therapy dogs master all these requirements hands (or paws) down. Lola impressed us immediately with her warmth and charm and good looks and made us feel quickly that here was a new resident that will be a real asset to our community and obviously was already working her therapy gift on us.

Guest author J. L. Jones is a member of Therapaws and Frank Bryce is President of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico.

Interested contributors can contact HSSNM at 575-523-8020.