

THE THERAPY DOGS AND CANINE ASSISTED READING PROGRAMS

DOUG LJUNGREN, VP of Companion & Performance Events AND

MARY BURCH, Director of Canine Good Citizen & AKC S.T.A.R. Puppy Programs

Invited by Carol Williamson, Houston Kennel Club

Therapy Dogs

When an application is submitted for the AKC Therapy Dog title, the application often arrives with a letter of recommendation. Imagine our surprise when a recent application came with not one, but twenty-two hand-written letters carefully crafted by a class of third graders who will tell you with great conviction that 'their' therapy dog is the world's best teacher.

Kicho, a Rhodesian Ridgeback owned by Carol and Chris Wagner from Langhorne, Pennsylvania), pays weekly visits to the third grade class at Holland Elementary School (North Hampton, Pennsylvania) as part of a canine assisted reading program. The purpose of this program is to build student motivation, enhance focus, and increase task persistence.

Registered with Therapy Dogs Incorporated (TD Inc.), Kicho and Carol have been volunteering as a therapy team in schools, nursing homes, and hospitals for more than four years. Kicho has also passed the AKC's Canine Good Citizen



The third grade class at Holland Elementary School (North Hampton, Pennsylvania)

Test and has earned a Companion Dog title in obedience.

Included with Kicho's AKC Therapy Dog title application was a letter from Dina Muncer, the teacher of the class visited by Kicho and Carol. Dina explained the positive impact the team has had on the class. "I am amazed at the benefits of reading-to-dogs therapy. The students jump at the opportunity to read with Kicho. His gentle and unassuming nature provides for a comfortable and exciting reading environment. This program provides an opportunity for students to develop a respect and appreciation for animals and develop a

sense of accomplishment as readers at the same time. They associate their positive feelings about Kicho with positive feelings towards reading. Kicho and Carol are truly making a difference in the lives of many of our students!"

During a recent visit, Carol mentioned that she was going to apply to the American Kennel Club in order for Kicho to

be awarded the AKC Therapy Dog title (THD). The class decided to assist by writing individual letters to the AKC in support of Kicho.

The twenty-two letters began with a common introduction provided by the teacher followed by the personal thoughts and feelings of the students. These heart-felt letters are about as close as one can come to capturing the simple but powerful value of therapy dogs in reading programs.

Carol Wagner said the first question every week was, "Has Kicho been awarded the AKC Therapy Dog title?" The students had taken Kicho's application up as a class campaign.

Composite Letter from the Third Grade Class at Holland Elementary School

Dear American Kennel Club,

My name is (22 students) and I am a third grader at Holland Elementary School. I am writing to recommend Kicho and his handler Mrs. Carol Wagner be awarded the title of AKC Therapy Dog. Kicho and Carol come to our class every Thursday. Kicho usually sits in our castle where we read to him.

- When Kicho and Ms Carol arrive, kids are smiling and excitement is in the air. Lots of kids are dying to read with Kicho.
- I like reading to Kicho because he listens very carefully to what we say.
- When Kicho is being read to, I see he enjoys it a lot.
- When I read to Kicho and Ms Carol it makes me feel good to know they are listening.
- Kicho makes reading enjoyable for me. He is a very nice dog and it makes me want to read more.
- While I read to him he is so calm he ALMOST falls asleep.
- He always sleeps and listens to me read and I get to pet his fluffy fur.
- It feels great when I read to Kicho because he relaxes, hears and sleeps at the same time.
- Kicho often smiles when we read because he likes to listen to stories.
- I like when he puts his head next to me when I read. I feel like he is focused on me.
- I feel comfortable with Kicho when I read to him.
- Kicho is very patient and he never interrupts me when I am reading.
- Kicho is never rude. He doesn't get up in the middle of reading.
- When reading to Kicho he is kind, gentle and he respects me.
- When I read to him I feel calm and relaxed.
- When I read to Kicho I feel happy and safe.
- When I read to Kicho it makes me feel proud and good.
- When I read to Kicho he makes me feel special and peachy.
- I try my best to read to Kicho and to test his brain. I want him to be the smartest dog in the World.
- Kicho makes me feel that he is my very own dog.
- I like to read to Kicho because it is fun doing stuff with dogs.
- Once everyone is done reading, I feel so good I could do 100 cartwheels.

So I hope you will consider awarding Kicho and Ms Carol the AKC Therapy Dog title.

Sincerely,

The students of the third grade class at Holland Elementary School

Their letters were posted on the class bulletin board.

This story needed to have a happy ending. The school year was about to end. The AKC needed to let the students

know their letters had been read, their thoughtful campaign was successful, and that Kicho had been awarded the title of AKC Therapy Dog.

Below is the letter sent to

teacher Dina Muncer and her 3rd grade class. Every student also received a small AKC Therapy Dog patch and the school received a copy of the AKC's Complete Dog Book for Kids.

LJUNGREN/BURCH, cont'd

The value of a therapy dog to a reading program, the commitment of a therapy dog's owner, the ingenuity of a third

grade teacher, the development of a love for reading, the positive feelings about dogs, the success of the students

thoughtful campaign to help a friend – it doesn't get any more positive than this!!



AMERICAN
KENNEL CLUB

Doug Ljungren
Vice President
Companion & Performance Events

May 16, 2012

Dina Muncer
Holland Elementary School
597 Beverly Road
North Hampton, PA 18966

Dear Ms Muncer and Students of the Third Grade Class,

Your letters written on behalf of Kicho have been received by the American Kennel Club. I enjoyed reading every letter and am most impressed with your ability to clearly explain how much Kicho and Carol mean to you. Many of you mentioned how happy you are to read to Kicho, how you concentrate on your reading because Kicho is listening and how exciting and enjoyable it is when Kicho and Carol come to visit. I am sure they have enjoyed listening to you read.

Kicho is obviously an exceptional dog. Your wonderful, well-written letters have helped convince the American Kennel Club that Kicho deserves to be awarded the title of AKC Therapy Dog!! Please congratulate Kicho and Carol on their next visit. Enclosed are AKC Therapy Dog patches for each of you to remember the enjoyable year you have spent with Kicho and Carol. Also enclosed is an *AKC Complete Dog Book for Kids* so your class can learn about the many breeds of dogs in the world.

Thank you for your letters and for recognizing that your input can make a difference. You realized that awarding this honor to Kicho was the right thing to do and you acted on your belief. Your letters were very much appreciated.

Sincerely,
The American Kennel Club

Doug Ljungren

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