

PETS & PEOPLE

Canine Partners Make Life Easier For Patients

(NAPSA)—Rebecca is a familiar face to many of the employees at the Philadelphia Shriners Hospital for Children.

She has been a patient at the hospital since she was 18 months old. She is now a 20-year-old college student at Brookdale Community College, where she is studying special education and American sign language. Rebecca has spina bifida and, like many Shriners patients, has had more surgeries than birthdays.

During a recent visit for surgery, Rebecca had a special guest accompany her at the hospital. Andy, a service dog, travels with Rebecca and assists her during her everyday daily living activities. He is a black Labrador that came to Rebecca from Canine Partners for Life, based out of Cochranville, Pa.

Service dogs are specially selected, bred, raised and trained to assist people who have physical disabilities. They open doors, pull wheelchairs, pick up dropped items, carry belongings in a backpack and perform more physical tasks.

By doing this and more, Andy increases Rebecca's independence and security, besides providing her with loving companionship.

"We were glad we were able to let Andy come into the pre-op and post-op holding area," said Mary Ann Jordan, RN, post anesthesia care unit. Andy was very well behaved as he sat right by



Andy helps Rebecca with the television remote control during her recent stay at the Shriners Hospital in Philadelphia.

Rebecca's stretcher. He watched the nurses every time they approached Rebecca. When we pushed her stretcher out the door he was right there behind her. It was obvious that Rebecca was his main concern."

Rebecca and Andy have been together now for two years. The training period lasted for three full weeks.

"I can only compare it to boot camp," said Rebecca.

Two years of training was required before Andy could be placed with an individual. Seven out of 10 dogs do not make it through the intense training associated with becoming a service dog. The training doesn't stop either. Andy is evaluated and retested on a regular basis.

Andy has changed Rebecca's life. He is trained to pick up her laundry and turn off the lights

when she is in bed. Andy has also changed her family's life. In the past, Rebecca's family was hesitant to leave her for any extended period of time. Now family members are able to run errands or go out of the home and feel comfortable that if Rebecca needs anything, Andy is there to assist.

During Rebecca's recent stay at the hospital, many of the nursing staff were pleasantly surprised by Andy's presence.

"When Rebecca was on bed rest, it really helped that Andy was there to keep her company. We gave Rebecca a single room to better accommodate her and Andy. Also, Rebecca's mom has to take Andy out at specific times each day. We were very impressed with Andy," said Myrina Vy, RN, on the adolescent unit.

For more information on Shriners' network of 22 hospitals that provide medical care and services totally free of charge to children with orthopaedic problems, burns and spinal cord injuries, write to: Shriners International Headquarters, Public Relations Dept., 2900 Rocky Point Dr., Tampa, FL 33607, or visit the Web site at www.shrinershq.org. Treatment is provided to children under age 18 without regard to race, religion or relationship to a Shriner.

If you know a child Shriners can help, call 1-800-237-5055 in the United States, or 1-800-361-7256 in Canada.