

A new kind of dog in town

Dana Boe, Editor

Celebrities and other people have made dressing dogs up in outfits popular. When Bobby or Emily Cost, who moved to Hatton in October of last year, walk a dog, however, it is often wearing a very specific orange vest – a vest that simply says “Service dog – do not pet.” Ever since college, Emily and Bobby, both criminal justice majors and members of the ROTC at the University of Cincinnati, have been working with a foundation called Circle Tail, Inc. whose purpose is to provide service and hearing dogs for no cost to the individual. The Costs’ job is to make sure the dogs are well trained, and although they get no pay for it, do not plan on stopping anytime soon.

“When you see the impact on people’s lives, that is the best part,” said Bobby. “These dogs give these people their independence back – give them a chance to feel human again.”

Emily started working with Circle Tail in 2008 and when Bobby and she started dating, he said he instantly fell in love with the program. Circle Tail became so much a part of their lives that when Bobby proposed to Emily, he had a training dog do it for him.

“I had a dog bring Emily a rose with a note attached asking if she would marry me,” he said.

“I read the note twice, and there was Bobby sitting on one knee waiting for me to look up,” said Emily.

When most people hear service dog, seeing eye dog or police dog are the two that come to mind, but the Costs say that dogs can be trained for many different things – diabetic response, seizure response, post



Bobby and Emily Cost with their new service dog, Maura, showing off the “look” command by staring at Bobby during the picture. The Costs have been training service dogs since 2008.

traumatic stress disorder, wheelchair restricted, autistic, and many other disorders. Because of the multitude of options, the Costs train each dog the same way to start.

“We train for everything, but the personality of the dog is going to decide its role,” said Bobby. “We always say that the dog chooses its own path.”

“We always try to match the dog with the right person,” said Emily. “We wouldn’t want to match a high energy dog with a stay at home person or a scenario like that.”

The Costs say that it takes between one and a half to two years to fully train a dog for service, and once trained, the dog will likely partner for six to eight years. After the dog is no longer able to do the work, mostly because of health, the Costs say that the dog is often adopted by the partner.

“You want a dog that is food oriented and not overly aggressive,” said Emily. “They have to be able to interact with all ages of people but stay focused when on duty and be good with other animals.”

They say the process is dif-



As they are training the dogs, the Costs would like people to know about the vest. When a service dog is wearing this, as stated, nobody is supposed to socialize with it.

ferent for each dog they train.

“Sometimes, the dog picks it up right away, and other times, it is a longer process,” said Emily. “It requires lots and lots of patience. When they are young, you start with the basic commands and then bring a new situation once they have mastered the previous skill.”

“Even when the process is slow, you can still see that the dog is developing more confidence,” said Bobby.

Along with training the dogs for service, Emily is happy to share information with the public about service dogs.

“I love to educate about service dogs,” she said. “A lot of people don’t understand what their rights are when it comes to these dogs and public or business places. The biggest thing we try to do is teach people not to fake a service dog – that really hinders the process for legitimate service dogs.”

Emily also noted that not all disabilities are visible or obvious, including heart patients, seizure patients, PTSD sufferers, etc. The other key thing Emily notes is the vest.

“When a service dog is out in public with the vest on, it is working, task driven, and should not be petted,” she said. “When they are out of the vest, they are like any other dog.”

She went on to say that more and more kids know the vest from seeing demonstrations in school.

“It’s a great thing when the kids point out the vest to the adults. They are doing the educating for us.”

There is much more to the service dog story and next week, we will cover the emotional bond between the Costs and the dogs, specific dogs stories and what happens to the dogs who don’t quite finish the program.