

Orinda Country Club Swim Team for the Dogs

By Jennifer Wake



From left to right: Katie Woodward with Roxy, Jackie Post with Libby, Cheryl Allen with Ellis, and Brooke Woodward with Tanner stand in front of swimmers at OCC swim-a-thon. Photos by Jennifer Wake

For the past several years, the Orinda Country Club (OCC) Sharks have sponsored an annual swim-a-thon as a way to give back to their community. On Monday, July 16, nearly 250 OCC swimmers took to the pool to raise money for PAWS with a Cause – a non-profit agency that trains assistance dogs to act as helpers for people with disabilities.

OCC members Katie and Brooke Woodward have a special understanding of the organization: For the past year, their family has raised Tanner – a future PAWS assistance dog.

“Tanner has been around the OCC swim team for two summers now and so many of the kids really know him and like him,” Katie said. The swim-a-thon was a way to really show the kids what Tanner will



PAWS Assistance Dog, Libby, shows off some of her skills to swimmers.

be able to do when he finishes college and to raise money to help the organization. It costs almost \$18,000 and takes over two years to train a dog to be ready to be certified and given to its new owner.”

Dogs like Tanner are specially trained to meet the unique needs of their partner. Before a dog is placed, PAWS comes to the client’s home and video tapes them doing difficult tasks that the dog will be trained to help with, such as pulling open doors, turning light switches on/off, or picking up an object as small as a dime. Dogs can even be trained to act as a brace to help people back to their feet after a fall.

Before Cheryl Allen received her dog Ellis six months ago, she couldn’t walk up ramps or stairs by herself, needed help standing up from chairs, and would frequently fall down, unable to get up by herself.

“Ramps were out of the question, so my husband would have to wheelchair me around. If I dropped something, and tried to pick it up, I would fall,” Allen said. “Ellis now picks stuff up for me, or he’ll get help if I fall. He’s opened more than just doors (literally) for me. He’s opened the opportunity for me to go out.”

After an extensive review process, dogs like Ellis are given to clients free of charge. Allen said she wouldn’t have been able to have a dog, if she had been required to pay for it.

Orinda resident and PAWS Field Representative Jackie Post says events like the swim-a-thon not only raise much needed funds, but help spread the word about this unique organization. “We’re always looking for puppy raisers to help the puppies with socialization,” Post said. Since dogs might need to be on a bus every day, or in a crowded office building, Post said puppies need to get out a lot and to different places.

In addition to the money raised at the OCC swim-a-thon, two families signed up to be puppy raisers. To learn more about puppy raising or for more information about PAWS with a Cause, visit <http://www.pawswithacause.org/>



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