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CCI dogs visit Miramonte students

By Cathy Dausman



Photos Cathy Dausman

Miramonte High School seniors Sophie Bubrick and Emilie Carrington recently introduced three beautiful girls - and their human partners - to Anthony Ohlson's special needs class.

Bubrick and Carrington oversee a therapy dog program at Miramonte, which now includes bringing Canine Companions for Independence volunteers and their dogs into Ohlson's class. They receive community credit for the program and are working to ensure it continues after they graduate.

Fundraising efforts last month on campus raised \$330 for the nonprofit CCI.

Two hearing assistance "girls" - a golden/Lab mix named Isabelle, and her kennelmate and dog friend Banni, a yellow Labrador - were escorted by owners Penny Hansen and Janet Levey. The third was a black Labrador and new mama dog named Maisy. Maisy is a breeder dog for CCI; she whelped her first litter in January, said owner Kenny Tuckerman.

Hansen and Levey are hearing impaired; Hansen explained their type of assistance dog tends to be more lively. That much was quickly apparent, as Isabelle befriended everyone eating lunch and puzzled over tennis balls seemingly stuck under table legs.

Banni was happy being asked to greet students by visiting, paws up onto their laps, or doling out wet,

sloppy kisses.

Carrington assured her visitors the students are super excited when the dogs visit.

"It's good to see them smile and interact," Ohlson agreed. Student reaction ranged from "hello doggy!" to body language proclaiming "get her out of my space!"

Hansen and Levey demonstrated how the dogs alert their owners to ringing doorbells, and explained the dogs are also trained to wake their humans up when a smoke alarm triggers. "They give you a sense of security," Levey says.

Professional Canine Companions instructors teach dogs to master over 40 commands during the six to nine months the dogs spend at CCI's Santa Rosa headquarters. Dog graduates become either service dogs, hearing dogs, facility dogs or skilled companion dogs and are matched with adults or children with special needs.

The resulting CCI dog graduate is said to be valued at approximately \$50,000, Hansen says, although some students in Ohlson's class might simply call each dog's presence priceless.

Canine Companions for Independence is a nonprofit organization founded in 1975 which enhances the lives of people with disabilities by providing highly trained assistance dogs and ongoing support to ensure quality partnerships. For details, visit www.cci.org.



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