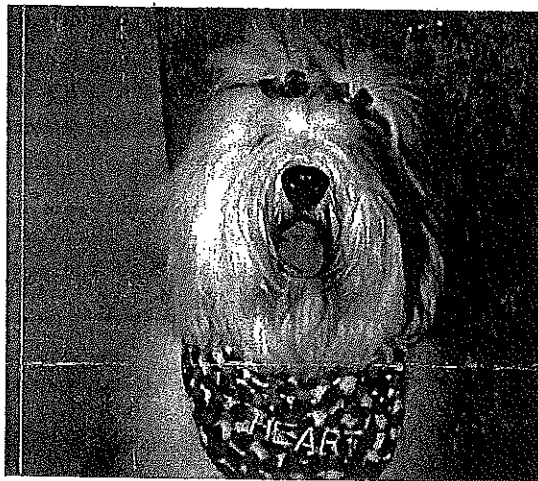


PAWS For Reading Program

PAWS For Reading program returns to the St. Louis Public Library's Kingshighway branch with a passionate Hill volunteer and her Heart - by Bagerli



The PAWS for Reading Program serves children in grades first to tenth in St. Louis area schools and/or who attend the St. Louis Public Library program. Children are encouraged to visit the library and read aloud to their canine buddies. The dogs in the program have been trained through the TOUCH Program and selected by the Support Dogs Inc., staff based on the qualities that make them suitable for the program. Children report that the calm and non-obtrusive dogs are lovable and give them confidence because the dog does not make fun of them if they read slowly or mess up pronouncing a word. Program results have shown an increase in reading levels and word recognition, a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in intra and interpersonal skills among the children. An incentive program provides children with rewards for each reading milestones reached throughout the program.

Valerie Anania, life-time Hill resident and St. Ambrose graduate, and her Old English Sheep Dogs (OES) have volunteered with the TOUCH program for 15 years. Valerie and Heart, her OES are on duty with the PAWS program on Wednesday afternoons from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. through April at the Kingshighway branch. Valerie shared, "when I first started volunteering with PAWS there were several kids who regularly came to the sessions and one of the girls was good reader; however she spoke very softly when reading aloud. I sensed that girl was shy about reading aloud, so every week I asked her to read a little louder so the younger kids could enjoy the story. The strategy worked and a once shy reader was reading louder and turning the book she was reading

around so that the other readers could see the pictures." Valerie shared another success story about a mother who updated her regularly on her daughter's reading progress throughout the school year and proudly reported that she moved up several reading levels. While the PAWS' program and Heart's encouragement was a positive influence on the girl's progress, Valerie credits the improvement to the active role this mother took in her daughter's reading development.

Valerie rescued a great Beard Collie, Mille in 1995. According to Valerie, walks with Mille resulted in passerby's asking if it was okay to pet the shaggy canine at the end of the leash. It was then that Valerie learned about the Therapy of Unique Canine Helpers, the TOUCH program offered by Support Dogs, Inc. The program required that Mille pass a temperament test then we both took a 12-week therapy dog certification training program. Valerie was hooked and was then unexpectedly offered, Pearl, an OES as Mille began to slow in her senior years. Pearl had been neglected and healed quickly with the love of Valerie, her family and Support Dogs, Inc. and quickly followed in Mille's paw steps. Heart arrived on the Hill from Colorado and soon Valerie began training her and soliciting her with others. In 2009, Heart graduated from the TOUCH program and regularly brings joy to those at the library, hospitals, retirement homes and homeless shelters.

Valerie's passion for the TOUCH is as strong as the pride she has for her Italian heritage. Valerie and her husband, Dino, met at St. Ambrose in 8th grade and the rest is history. "Raising our children on the Hill has given them a wonderful sense of who they are and where they have come from-their roots are firmly planted here," Valerie commented when reflecting on her life-time residence on the Hill. Pearl and Heart welcome the opportunity to introduce the TOUCH program, with Valerie's help, to other children in the area and share how dogs impact humans every day, especially to those who are ill. ***Valerie and Heart just learned that have been selected as the featured "Guest Dog of the Week," at the Dog Museum located in Queeny Park on March 26, 2011 from 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Well behaved dogs, and their owners, are welcomed to visit.***