



# COLBY FREE PRESS

10 pages

## Boy and dog are more than just 'buddies'

By Patty Decker  
Free Press Editor

Most people understand the function that a seeing eye dog can do for someone who is blind or how a wheelchair bound person can get help with an assistance dog — but few understand the role of the service dog for an autistic child.

Yet for one 10-year-old boy and his parents, their dog, Candy, is more than a pet — she is crucial to his development.

Parker Weishaar, 10, suffers from Asperger Syndrome, which is a mild type of autism and in some professional circles, described as a nonverbal learning disability.

Parker's parents Wendy and Bill Weishaar of Tuscon, Ariz., both have roots to Colby having graduated from Colby High School.

Late last week, Wendy arrived with her son, Parker, and their dog Candy, to visit her mother, Peggy Frahm.

With the addition of the two-year-old golden retriever about eight weeks ago, life for Parker and his family have changed for the better.

Prior to Candy, the Weishaars didn't go away from their home often.

"We didn't go to stores a lot," Wendy said, "because Parker had a hard time leaving home."

Since Parker has Asperger Syndrome, he has obsessive routines and is deficient in social skills—having trouble with transitions or changes, preferring sameness, his mom explained.

Those with Asperger Syndrome, she said, have normal IQs

and Parker, like many children with this affliction, exhibit exceptional skill or talent in a specific area. Parker almost fits the textbook description of AS — sounding like a "little professor."

Another difficulty with AS is that children like Parker have a hard time reading body language and difficulty understanding proper body space. In other words, he might go on and on about a particular subject, long after everyone is through listening.

Once the family accepted their son had AS, for the next several years they worked with Parker and other professionals on social skills, social situations and communication. Professionals have accomplished a lot and continue to do so in private schools and through constant work with Parker.

However, one day not long ago, Wendy said she was watching one of the science channels and there was a program on how using dogs and animals to reach people—children with autism or those profoundly autistic.

After contacting North Star Foundation, one of the many service dog foundations, and writing about the family, they were to get a dog in the spring.

One thing lead to another, though, and the foundation asked if the family would mind keeping another service dog (their dog was not ready yet) for about six weeks until "Rusty," was ready.

Wendy, who thought this could be a long six weeks, couldn't believe it when the next morning Parker and Candy were rolling around in the grass together.

"I later called the director and told her that we really want to take



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Parker Weishaar, son of Wendy and Bill Weishaar, Tuscon, Ariz., and his friend and service dog, Candy, want others to understand how much they need one another. Candy, a two-year-old Golden Retriever, works about five hours a day helping Parker with

Candy," Wendy said, "and in response the director told her that actually that was a good thing since Rusty had flunked out of puppy school."

The biggest obstacle now, said Wendy, is getting people in the public sector to understand Candy and her importance as Parker's helper.

For example, dogs smell something called Pheromones, which happens before an anxiety attack. "Candy will get tuned into Parker and will get in his face to try and stop the attack from occurring," she said.

Ever since Candy's arrival, there have been no bad anxiety attacks,

Wendy said. Parker also takes Candy to school with him and she's become "quite the school mascot."

The private school allows Candy a little bed in the classroom and he has become the reading buddy to many of the students in the 4th and 5th grades.

"Candy also gets to visit the preschoolers and is their special buddy too," Wendy said. Preschoolers will even drop snacks for Candy.

"It's hard, but in the eight weeks we have had her, surprising many stores or other facilities are edu-

Asperger Syndrome (a type of autism) and the rest of the time serves as Parker's friend. According to the American Disabilities Act, Parker cannot handle Candy alone, but for the picture Wendy was standing close by.

cated about this type of dog," she said.

Another issue with Candy is that with most service dogs, they are not approachable. Many animals cannot be patted or allowed social interaction, but that's not the case with Parker's dog, Candy.

Because Candy came from a foundation, the family paid nothing for her. They were asked to do fundraising projects for the foundation and that's all. To train a dog like Candy from puppy to service dog costs between \$8,000 and \$10,000.

In fact, only about one out of six dogs will make the program, and

placement can be difficult too.

All-in-all it is working out for the Weishaar family, though. "She is a child magnet," Wendy said about Candy. "But, at the same time, we don't want to flaunt her either and we prefer not taking Candy into restaurants."

During this interview, Parker was busy talking about his airplane projects and many, many other subjects of interest.

As Wendy and her son were getting ready to leave, Parker asked his mom, "Does Candy like me?" "No," Wendy said, "she loves you."

## County commissioners have busy agenda Thursday

By Tisha Cox  
Colby Free Press

The Thomas County commissioners have a busy meeting during their end-of-month huddle on Thursday at 9 a.m. at the courthouse.

Everything from a budget request to health insurance premiums for county employees are on the agenda. The Alcohol and Drug Abuse Council is scheduled to make a budget request during the meeting.

Also on the agenda is a discussion with Central Benefits agent Randy Dick on health insurance premi-

ums. County credit cards have also been a recent issue the commissioners have been tackling. County Emergency Medical Services Director Kathi Wright will be at the meeting to discuss her department's credit cards.

Emergency Management Director Jim Engel will be on hand to talk about business storm shelters and 911 software for the county.

Other items on the agenda:

- A discussion on finding two new members for the Thomas County Fair Board.
- A resolution to appoint Mary

Cech as county appraiser.

- Approval of accounts payable, payroll and the Monday, June 20 minutes.
- An agreement with Commercial Sign to preserve the courthouse clock tower.
- A request for contributions from the Silver Haired Legislature.
- Mowing quotes.
- Boiler inspection certificates.
- Fish and Game clerk fees.
- A letter from the Secretary of State affecting county operations and budgets. The meeting is open to the public.

## Donations still needed for display

By Tisha Cox  
Colby Free Press

Want to help the community celebrate the Fourth of July? A little dip into the pocket book would help.

Rick Dickman, assistant fire chief and education officer with the Colby Fire Department, and one of the event's organizers, said donations are still needed to pay for the annual fireworks display.

"We're probably half-way there," he said. People can still sponsor a shell display for \$20, or

they can donate any amount they want, he said.

Anyone wanting to know what the show will look like doesn't have to wonder anymore.

"It will be similar to last year's," Dickman said, adding there are 280 large individual shells for the display, along with six finale boxes for the end of the show.

The Kiwanis Club sponsors the display and also pays for it, Dickman said. Members of the fire department who are certified igniters

actually set up and shoot off the show.

The show will start at 10:15 p.m. Monday at the Thomas County Fairgrounds.

Anyone wanting more can call Dickman at 460-4454 or the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce at 460-3401.

Donations can be made at the fire station or by sending them to the Thomas County/Colby Kiwanis Club, P.O. Box 501, Colby, Kan. 67701.

## Mr. Movie



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Pioneer Memorial Library Director Jeff Friesen gave a review of the movie "Hotel Rwanda" Tuesday at the Senior Progress Center. Friesen was spotlighting the library's large movie collection instead of his usual book review.

## Rexford man sentenced today in two-year old shoot out charges

By Tisha Cox  
Colby Free Press

A Rexford man had his day in Thomas County District Court today. Roger F. Wark had his preliminary hearing for charges stemming from a May, 2003 incident in Rexford.

Paul Oller of Hays, Wark's attorney, told Judge Rick Ress that Wark

was pleading guilty to a lesser charge of three counts of assault on a law enforcement officer.

He had originally been charged with three counts of aggravated assault on a law enforcement officer.

Wark was sentenced to 12 months on each assault charge, so he will serve 36 months in the county jail along with 24 months of supervised

probation. Wark will also be responsible for paying court and probation fees and fines but there was no restitution involved.

"I'm going to fine him \$250 on each count," the judge said.

County Attorney Andrea Wyrick said after the hearing she had planned to take the case to trial but didn't on the recommendation of

law enforcement.

She said they were happy with the lesser charges and added whether or not the case went to trial, Wark was going to end up on probation either way.

"It satisfies their need for closure," Wyrick said.

She also said with the plea, it avoided the cost of a lengthy jury

trial, which will save taxpayer money, which was another reason law enforcement went along with the lesser charges.

Wark was shot by members of the Special Response team made up of deputies from the Thomas County Sheriff's Office and officers from the Colby Police Department after they responded to a call at his home

in Rexford two years ago.

Reports said Wark was threatening suicide and firing a gun inside the house.

After trying to communicate with Wark, he confronted officers with a gun and was later taken down by law enforcement gun fire, and eventually ended up in a Denver hospital.

