

Dog’s personality important factor in ability to do the job

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unusual names, like foreign cars or rivers,” Alexander said. “There was a dog that Mississippi liked to play with, and his name was Nissan.”

Mississippi was taught all the usual doggie commands — sit, stay, and so on — with special training in calming and soothing distraught humans.

His personality, of course, is an important factor in his ability to do his job. “Mississippi just loves people,” Alexander said. “He’s a real love bug.”

Each morning, the dog is assigned to a different classroom at Project Alternative.

He later goes on to the Special Purpose School.

“I don’t feed him in the morning before we leave, so the kids feed him and groom him,” Alexander said. “We try to teach them how to work with him and use the proper commands.”

He said that, on average, Mississippi is called in two or three times each day to calm students who have lost control.

“The school staff knows his schedule, so they know where to find Mississippi,” Alexander said. “What they usually do is vacate the classroom, then send Mississippi in

to work with the student. He’ll go up to the student, and before you know it, the student will be petting him and calming down.

“I’ve told the kids that they can feel free to tell Mississippi all their problems.”

And, as a good therapist should, Mississippi always keeps everything said to him strictly confidential. “He has never, ever told me anything a student has said to him,” Alexander said.

Mississippi has also visited several nursing homes. “We have a student singing group at the school, and they go sing at nursing homes,” Alexander said.

“We take Mississippi along, so nursing home residents get to hear the kids sing, and also get to visit with the dog. He’s very good with them, too.”

Mississippi wears a special harness that identifies him as a service dog. When that harness comes off, however, he becomes a playful family pet. He has been warmly welcomed by Alexander’s wife, Lorna, and daughters Gina, 14, and Cara, 11.

The only person who hasn’t been happy to see him is Ferguson, a Corgi who was previously the

family’s only dog — and probably wishes he still was.

“Corgis are herders, and Ferguson will herd Mississippi into a corner and not let him go anywhere,” Alexander said. “We usu-

ally try to keep them separated.”

Mississippi also still has some puppy chewing issues, which has been a bit of a problem. “He ate our hot tub cover,” Alexander said. “He also bit a big hunk out of a rum cake

my wife made.”

But these problems are minor, compared with the calm and emotional healing that Mississippi brings.

“Once I’d had a bad day,” Alex-

ander said.

“Mississippi sensed that, came over to me and put his paw on my knee. You know, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with me using his services now and then.”

Committee toughens sex offender bill

TOPEKA (AP) — A bill imposing tough penalties on sex offenders, especially those whose victims are children, got tougher Thursday when the Senate Judiciary Committee overhauled it before sending it to the chamber for debate.

As drafted, the bill imposes a mandatory 25-year minimum sentence for rape and aggravated sodomy of someone under 14 if the offender is 18 or older. The committee added five additional violent sex crimes to that list, including aggravated indecent liberties with a child and sexual exploitation of a child.

After serving the 25-year minimum, offenders would be subject to a lifetime of parole and wearing a bracelet that would allow officials to track their movements. Currently, the penalty for rape of a child is about 12 to 14 years and for aggravated sodomy nine to 10.

The bill also was changed to say a second conviction would result in a minimum of 40 years.

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