

## A barking good lesson

Assistance dogs get a training day at screening of "Marley & Me"

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The harshest of critics may think modern movies have gone to the dogs. On Sunday afternoon, seven dogs went to the movies.

One black and six yellow Labrador retrievers came to Lancaster's Regal Manor Cinema, 1246 Millersville Pike, as their volunteer trainers and one owner watched the film "Marley & Me."

The dogs are part of the Dogs program at United Disabilities Services in Lancaster, and the outing served as a training run.

Jen Howell of Lancaster brought her dog, Campbell, who is a graduate of the program. Howell does not let being in a wheelchair stop her from participating in activities. Three year old Campbell accompanies her, assisting with tasks such as picking up keys and remote controls. The yellow lab also can give things to people, such as a payment to a cashier. Sunday afternoon's performance however, was on the house for Howell and the trainers.

Program director, Jill Harris said NLAD dogs typically go to movies as part of their training to learn to stay despite distractions. But when a movie featuring a dog – such as "Marley & Me" or "Because of Winn Dixie", the theaters, the trainers go with their dogs as a group. Before the 2:30pm showing of "Marley & Me," Harris said the movie was an ideal choice for service dogs because it prominently features a sometimes barking yellow lab. "If they are going to bark at anything," Harris said, "it is going to be that."

With the exception of a few quiet reactions during a chase scene, the dogs lay quietly next to their owners, some of the trainers began to cry during a scene, one of the labs sensed its trainer's distress and laid his head against her leg in sympathy.

The event did not go completely without a hitch. The two rows of seats that had been roped off for the group were partially filled with other patrons when the trainers arrived. A few switching of seats allowed sufficient room for the humans and dogs. All in a day's work in training a service dog.

Howell said Campbell is a loyal dog. She was once in a minor accident as a passenger in an accessible taxi. The collision caused her to slide down on her wheelchair, while a seatbelt held her securely in place. The taxi driver told Howell it would be a couple minutes until he could help her. She recalled that Campbell barked continuously through those three minutes until Howell was back in her chair normally. "He is very protective," Howell said.

Before being matched with Howell, Campbell was trained for two years by volunteer Linda Rineer and her daughter, Bethany. They said Campbell chose them to be his trainers. "From the time he opened his eyes," Bethany Rineer said, "his eyes would follow us wherever we went." The hardest part of training a puppy to be a service dog, the Rineers said, was giving Campbell up for training with Howell. Seeing the dog they raised helping her, though, made the separation easier. "We did not really lose a dog," Linda Rineer said of her relationship with Howell. "We gained a friend."