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Project's dogs protect people

Dawn Paugh
For the Oregon Daily Emerald

"There is no program like this in the world," said Shelley Reecher, founder of the Project Safe Run Foundation. In the last decade, this Eugene organization has been about the old adage phrase "dog is man's best friend."

The Project Safe Run Foundation (PSR) is a registered nonprofit corporation that lends out dogs primarily to women for the purpose of security and protection. These canines are used as a safety precaution while jogging or walking.

Dogs come to PSR — an all volunteer organization — from Canine Training and Security in Eugene, their training. The PSR dogs are then housed in private homes designated as chapter houses.

There are 45 chapter houses in the United States, half of which are in Eugene. The director of the chapter house will schedule a time for the person to pick up a dog, day or night, seven days a week. The user must fill out an application and sign an agreement being allowed to reserve a dog.

When a dog is accompanying someone, the dog walks on a 6-foot leash and wears an identifiable backpack that carries personal belongings, keys, and quarters for phone calls.

"The dogs are my children," Reecher said. "We care for them a great deal."

People do not just choose any canine they want. Instead, one is selected for them to best suit their speed.

The canines are trained to avoid being lured away or subdued by food, and they learn to obey only the holder of the leash and not be distracted.

"This doesn't mean they're perfect all the time, but then neither are we," said Kori Burton, a University senior and Reecher's apprentice for the past 10 months.

The dogs are available on a monthly basis to anyone age 59 or younger for a donation of \$25 per month (or that equivalent in volunteer work). People 60 years or older may use the dogs for free.

One year alone costs the organization \$75,000 for the care and upkeep of the animals. From the start of the organization, Reecher has not only donated her time and effort, but \$262,000 of her own inheritance as well. The \$25 donation helps defray

the major costs, but it doesn't cover everything. The need for PSR dogs throughout the nation is greater than the funding available for the organization.

Reecher's training began when she was three years old in England. Her governess and nanny wanted her to learn more about animals and thus gave her a broad-based spectrum on the subject. She always worked with dogs and horses, and her expertise came from clinics, reading and personal experiences.

Reecher moved to Eugene in 1981 to attend the University. To avoid running alone, she adopted a 7-month-old Doberman Pinscher named Jake from a dog pound. Her roommate ran with Jake, but other friends did too, until as many as 16 people were running with him.

Over time, she acquired more dogs until her one-bedroom apartment housed 12 Dobermans. She found homes for the animals and when someone wanted a running companion, the person was referred to one of the many houses that are now chapter houses.

"I would have shot myself if I'd known how much work this would be," said Reecher. "I can't do it all."

Over the past 14 years this has been a 100 percent effective protective program, according to Reecher. When she began training and supplying dogs to women in Eugene, the need and response to the use of the canines caused the project to grow.

Due to the large demand of PSR dogs on campus, student funds have paid for the training of three canines.

"Administration has yet to provide a permanent location for these dogs to be kept for students to check them out," said Reecher. "Until they do, the dogs cannot be brought on campus for student use. Students have paid for the training, but the dogs are in limbo. They're trained and ready to go."

"Because of those dogs, people are safe," Reecher said. "That's my passion."

Anyone interested in participating in this program should call the Project Safe Run Foundation at 345-8086 and leave a name, number and message with the 24 hour answering service. Someone will return the call with information about the chapter house nearest you.

MEASURE

Continued from Page 1

ferred to other parts of the corridor.

The bridge structure will cost \$10 million. This means the federal government will contribute \$8 million to the total cost of the project, down from the \$24 million promised.

Additional funding includes \$14 million from the state and \$3 million from Lane County.

"When the average citizen really understands the enormous cost of this project, the lack of vision around it and

what it will mean for the destruction of downtown Eugene, we're convinced it will be soundly defeated," Hyatt said in a news release.

However, Jeff Miller, co-chairman of Citizen's Planning for Our Future and former Eugene mayor, said the No on 20-23 campaign is dealing in misinformation and has clouded the issue.

"These folks play very loose with the truth," said Miller, adding that the issue is not about money.

Phil Weiler, public information analyst for the city, said it is

impossible to have all the money in hand before construction starts.

The construction will not begin any earlier than 1997 or 1998.

The plan submitted to the voters includes six lanes of auto traffic; two lanes for fixed rail; two lanes of two-way traffic; two lanes for pedestrian traffic; a new bicycle/pedestrian bridge separate from the new bridge but immediately adjacent to it; and a new highway from Oakmont Way to run behind the Albertson's store and under I-105 to connect with Centennial Boulevard.



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