

Lisa Orth and Jag- A Crisis Response Team

By Scott Laird

Lisa Orth is not your average dog owner. And Jag Orth, Lisa's Siberian Husky, is certainly not your average dog. Together Lisa and Jag are a Crisis Response Team, helping victims of disasters with their emotional needs.

"Crisis Response is a certification above and beyond a therapy dog," explained Lisa during a recent interview. "It's a working dog classification, similar to but not the same as a service dog."

Lisa and Jag have been together since Jag was a puppy, for eight and a half years. She began taking Jag to her son Brandon's school class, and Jag did well with the children. "I discovered that Jag had a special gift, an ability to make connections with people in need. I began to work with him as a therapy dog, and kept giving him more challenges. He kept rising to the different work we would try. He's taken me far more places than I expected because of his gift."

Lisa and Jag will get called to a variety of situations, from search and rescues, to helping with sexually assaulted children, to schools that have lost students in a tragedy. Lisa and Jag also do educational programs in schools. "Jag decides how he is going to work in any given situation," explained Lisa. "He has a natural sense, and does what they need. He is able to make a connection first, which often allows people to open up and speak. I am just Jag's transporter."

Lisa talked about a recent situation that involved a death of a high school student. "We worked there for three or four days. The first day we spent in the safe room, where the students are encouraged to come and seek counseling and support. After that, Jag just roams the school off leash. He can sense who needs him. Often the kids who are uncomfortable going in to ask for help will meet Jag and then be able to open up and talk about what is happening."

Search and rescue situations are different. Jag doesn't actually help with the search. Instead, Jag works with the families of those missing, giving them emotional support and taking them away from the Incident Command allowing those involved in the search to speak freely about the situation. Jag will also work with volunteers and rescue personnel after a search has been completed.

Lisa recently had a new addition to her family. Besides husband Mike, son Brandon and dogs Jag and Sasha (an older Siberian Husky), Lisa has newly acquired three month old Equma. "It means 'fire' in Eskimo," explained Lisa. Equma arrived from Utah, and will be trained in Search and Rescue by Brandon working with Vernonia Police Sergeant Mike Kay. Equma will hopefully become Jag's replacement on the Crisis Response Team when Jag is ready to retire. "We will learn about Equma as he grows up and find out what his gifts are, and then work with him around that. Each dog is different in what they are good at. Some dogs are great with little children, others better with the elderly. Some dogs are good service dogs, others better at crisis response."

Lisa is also working with the Oregon Trail Chapter of the American Red Cross on a pilot program to certify dogs and their handlers in crisis response. "911 showed the impact of what can happen when there are no guidelines. A lot of good dogs were pushed to go beyond their abilities during that crisis. The handlers were overworked, and their dogs took on so much of the emotional impact that many of them were not able to work effectively afterwards."

Columbia County Rider Provides Free Shuttle Service to Victims

The Columbia County Rider, the public transportation service provider for our area, came through in the pinch. Because so many residents were displaced or lost their vehicles to flood damage, and because of the distant location of the main Red Cross shelter from flood victim services (1.5 miles outside of town), there became a need for regular shuttle service in Vernonia during the recovery period.

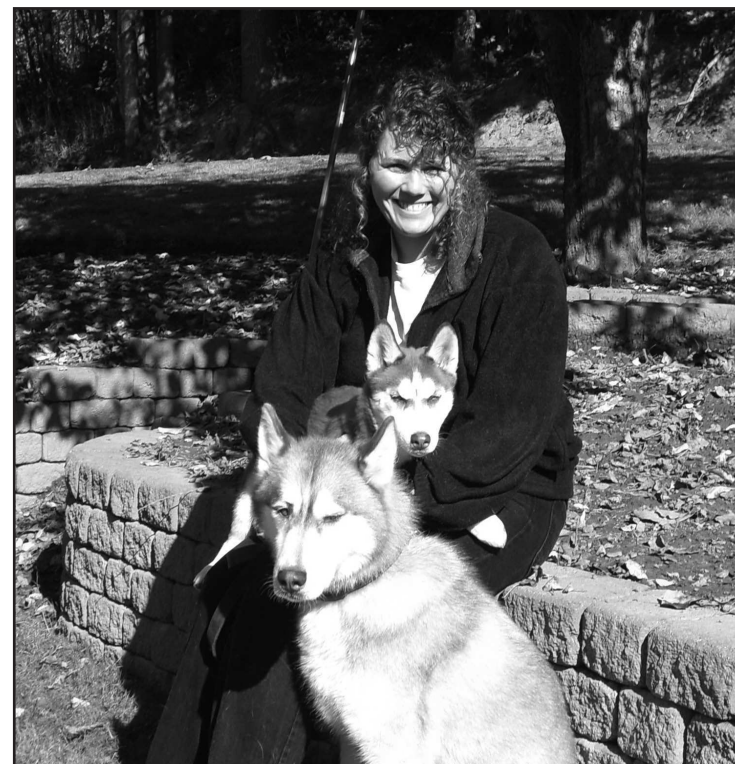
"We had days that we transported as many as sixty people," said Henry Heimuller, the county manager of the system.

The shuttle operated daily from 8:30 a.m. until 7:30 p.m. during the first weeks of recovery, cutting back service hours as the need dissipated. Service was free of charge. The shuttle made regular stops at City Hall and the Fire Station and other stops upon request.



Because of the interest in the shuttle service, Columbia County Rider is now looking for ways to expand service in the Vernonia area in the future, according to Heimuller.

"The Oregon Trail Chapter is one of the top chapters in the U.S. for numbers of people deployed, and have a reputation for sending out people who are trained and educated, who know what to do," said Lisa. "I am working to establish rules, regulations, and certification standards for Crisis Response Teams that will assess the handler's ability to read their dog for stress, and make sure that their work will benefit all who come in contact with them. It will be a three day testing process and handlers will be required to recertify each year. Having standards is so important for the safety of all involved especially for the dogs."



The above article was written before the Flood of 2007. Lisa Orth was instrumental in establishing the initial shelters for victims of the disaster, setting up safe, warm and dry places for displaced persons to rest. Lisa continued to work tirelessly throughout the first weeks of recovery as the community liaison with the American Red Cross, and helping make sure the shelter at Cedar Ridge ran as smoothly as possible. Because of her many responsibilities during the flood recovery period, Lisa was unable to use Jag in his Crisis Response capacities. "I took him up to meet the Red Cross personnel, because they had heard about Jag. But with my own volunteer efforts, I just had too much going on to be able to work with him around all the people."

Legacy Clinic Reaches Out to Flood Ravaged Community

When you walk into Legacy Clinic Northwest you will see a beehive of activity as the staff care for 150 patients a day. What you may not see at first is the giving nature of the people behind the name tags, charts and stethoscopes. The staff of fifty, including doctors, nurses and office personnel gave up their annual holiday party this year and instead donated the money to the flood victims of Columbia County. "When we saw the video on the news from the floods in Vernonia and then the mudslide in Clatskanie, we knew we had to help," said Stephen Baugh, M.D., site medical director.

Combined with the money the doctors and staff had set aside for the party, they went on to raise more than a thousand dollars. The money will go to the Columbia County Flood Victims, a fund set up by the county commissioners to cover any unmet needs of families and businesses not covered by other sources. Dr. Baugh explained, "We wanted to know the money would go directly to the people who need it the most."

Legacy Clinic Northwest offers services in internal medicine, cardiology, pulmonary medicine and sleep medicine. It is located on the Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital & Medical Center campus at 1130 NW 22nd Avenue, Suite 220, Portland, Oregon. The clinic hours are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. The clinic is currently accepting new patients.

<p>Midway Veterinary Clinic Small and Large Animals</p>  <p>Open in Vernonia Wednesday & Saturday 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.</p> <p>Call for Appointments (503) 429-1612 Or 24 hr. Emergency Number (503) 397-6470 805 Bridge Street Vernonia, OR</p>	<p>PAYROLL PLUS LLC Vernonia, OR</p> <p>Income Tax Return Preparation (Individual & Small Business) Payroll Services Bookkeeping</p> <p>Edi Sheldon, LTC 503-429-1819</p>
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