

The Furriest Firefighter

Firedog is much more than a mascot

BY KENDALL FIELDS

Don't let his sweet brown puppy-dog eyes fool you. Cody (short for Fire Code Inspector) isn't just another animal mascot who sits on the back of the fire engine looking cute for pictures.

This Dalmatian is part of a unique program called "Fire Safety Fever." Deputy Fire Marshal Amy Linder, Cody's owner and handler, created the program in Yakima, Wash., before bringing it to Eugene four years ago.

Using props such as a giant cell phone and a smoke detector donated from local businesses, Cody teaches five important fire safety messages: stop, drop and roll; crawl low under smoke; smoke alarm basics; in an emergency dial 911; have an escape plan and meeting place.

Linder says that this program, which is geared toward first graders, is actually effective with all children since it grabs their attention. "If Cody can do it, so can you," Linder says.

The 7-year-old pup is also a registered therapy dog, volunteering with organizations such as People And Animals Who Serve (PAAWS) and National Animal Assisted Crises Response, with a belief that positive interaction with animals can heal.

Cody also travels to memorials across the nation to comfort people in process of grieving. At a recent memorial, Cody was the only one who could comfort a young boy who'd just lost his father in the line of duty — the boy even eked out a small smile to pose for a picture with Cody.

"A dog is such a normal thing," Linder says. "Just that unconditional love and nonjudgmental aspect that people who don't really want to talk or have a hard time talking about their emotions sometimes feel overwhelmed," she says, looking at the

photo of the boy and Cody that now hangs in her office. "Being able to have a dog come up and not want to talk ... is pretty cool."

Cody's efforts to improve the community and help others have not gone unrecognized. In April, Cody was inducted into the prestigious Oregon Fire Service Honor Guard, combining his fire-safety work and therapy work in representing the fire service community.

"It's cool because he's the member, not me," Linder says. "I wear the Eugene uniform. They gave him a badge and uniform. I'm just there because I hold the other end of the leash."

Cody has also become a bit of a celebrity with "Cody Fever," complete with his own website, fire-safety trading cards and Facebook fan page exploding across the nation.

From the warmth in her voice as she describes Cody, the dozens of pictures of Cody tacked to the walls of her office and the awards Cody has won that line her shelves, it is obvious that Linder has Cody fever too. "He's awesome. He's just my best friend in the world."

Her favorite time with Cody is their Saturday morning cuddle session. "Nothing beats Cody kisses," Linder says, rubbing the dog's neck and kissing his forehead.

But on this dreary July morning, Cody is taking a break from the hype to recover from recent spinal surgery. The surgery sent Cody's fans and coworkers into a frenzy of worry, with dozens of Facebook messages, get-well cards and friendly text messages sent Linder and Cody's way. It even got Linder thinking of getting a sibling sometime this winter to train and help Cody with all of his work. **EW**



AMY LINDER AND CODY

PHOTOGRAPH BY TODD COOPER

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