

Dog days of Summer: Looking beyond the end to a new start



By Caitlyn May
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Summer is as close to perfect as a dog can get.

She has spent her 12 years in the office of her owner, Eve Peirce, a counselor at South Lane Mental Health in Cottage Grove.

She's welcomed children of all stripes into the room with a wag of her tail and an offering of a toy. She engages with children who are nervous, lonely and frustrated, knowing when to play and when to lay in her bed, close by, a silent, steady

support for instances that weigh a little more.

Summer loves the kids, Peirce says. That's why, even though it may be hard to watch Peirce with another dog, Summer doesn't bat an eye.

She'll want the kids to have someone when she's gone.

During a routine check-up in April of this year, the vet discovered a tumor.

There wasn't much to be done.

"It wasn't in a good place to operate," Peirce said. "Dogs with this type of tumor, the vet said, will usually last a few months. Summer's gone eight."

It's a little harder for Summer to get up now, her

hind legs no longer young and spry and while the tumor doesn't seem to cause her pain, Peirce knows her time is coming.

In August, Summer had a bad fall. The vet had warned that the dog would have a "catastrophic failure" one day and when Summer's legs gave out after a bath, Peirce feared the worst.

"I thought, this is the end," she said.

So, she searched the local animal shelters and began to research other facilities. She needed a patient, loving, smart, playful dog who could take direction, learn and be able to work with her every day. Also, one that didn't shed.

"There was a place in Bend and their dogs were \$950. So, I called and told them what I needed and what kind of work I did," she said.

By the time Doodles and Poodles, owned by Marcia and David Shannon, called her back, Summer had perked up.

But the Shannons had been so touched by the work Peirce and Summer did, that they offered to donate a puppy.

"I thought by the time I got another dog, it would be after Summer was gone," Peirce said. However, unable to pass the opportunity up, she traveled to Bend and met with the breeders.

"I sat in the cage and this puppy toddled up to me," she said. "This fat puppy toddled up and sat down and just looked at me. I looked in her eyes and asked her if she could be a therapy dog for me and she looked back at me with this look that said, 'I'd sure try.'"

It was Sally.

She's a Labrador/Poodle mix who will grow to be about 50 pounds. For now, she hangs out with Summer for a bit, licking at her ears and annoying her in the way a puppy does and training to fill in for her when the time comes.

"With their parents' permission, I've taken pictures of the kids with their friend Summer so they'll have those and we've been talking for a few months how she's getting old and has some health problems," Peirce said of explaining Sum-

mer's inevitable absence.

The children Peirce treats will also have the books she published about Summer to remember their friend by.

"Summer finds a job" details Summer's journey to Peirce's office. Initially, she was intended to be a show dog but her back was too long. Next, she was trained to be a service dog but was a bit "too goofy."

"It shows kids that she tried to do these other things," Peirce said. "It's a 'keep going' story."

One day soon, Summer won't be in the office. She won't trail out to the lobby, returning children to their parents and wandering to those still waiting—having a knack for finding the people who needed to talk to her that day. And while Peirce says it won't be the same without Summer, she's grateful for the time they've had.

"If you take good care of your pets, they get old," she said. "She's been amazing. She knows she's my girl."



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Eve Peirce with Summer (L) and Sally (R). Above, Summer is pictured at home.

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