

Exceptional Dogs for Exceptional People

by Max Gold

My name is Max Gold. I live in Merrick New York with my brother, parents, and my two dogs, Lakota and Melissa. Lakota and I graduated as a service team, about a month ago from Canine Companions for Independence (CCI) in Medford, NY. The training lasted about two weeks. It was intense, but it was definitely worth it.

It seems like only yesterday that I was in training to get my first dog Langley, who was with me for 10 wonderful years. When I got Langley, I was only 8 years old, and I just lost him two years ago.

When I went for the training to get Langley at CCI in August 2002, this was before they moved into the beautiful Miller Family Campus. Their kennels were in trailers; the team training was held in only one classroom; meals were served in the classroom; and most of all, students had to spend a large amount of money to stay in hotels for two weeks while training. And everything was cluttered. They've come a long way from being at Farmingdale University.

Since July of 2008, it's safe to say that CCI is finally home. The new facility is 11 acres and 39,000 square feet wide. It provides more than enough space to practice commands, demonstrate how commands are performed, and simulate other life-like scenarios to help the students feel ready to take their dogs out in public.

Since the region opened in 1989, 612 assistance dogs have been placed and roughly 300 teams are still active today.

The campus' Canine Care Center features 35 kennels, exercise yards, and a grooming facility. It also has separate kennels and play yards for puppies.

The "Hagedorn Team Training Residence Hall" has 11 spacious, fully handicapped accessible dorm rooms for training participants and their families. The kitchen area provides a community space with an accessible kitchen, dining room and lounge. And there are five training rooms that are utilized during the training.

Currently, the region has more than 300 committed volunteers, 176 puppy raisers that are changing the lives for people with disabilities. Not to mention there are seven active chapters throughout the region ensuring our organization continues to provide



“exceptional dogs for exceptional people.”

I had the opportunity to call the Miller Family Campus home for two weeks in the beginning of February 2013. The accommodations couldn't have been better. From the full-sized kitchen, comfortable dorm rooms...and most of all the heart-warming, motivating, broad-minded, diligent, determined, dynamic, admirable, modest, quick-witted, loyal, creative instructors. There are no other words that can describe how wonderful and rare all of them are. We couldn't have

had a more dedicated staff to help us get through the training.

Along with the instructors, I met some new friends. They drove for more than five hours to get to the training. Throughout the two-week training, we got to know each other more and more each day. By the end of the training, it was as if I knew all of them for a long time.

I've been a proud family member of CCI for 11 wonderful years. They've done so much for me, and I've always been there for them to make their presence known by making speeches, participating in demonstrations and showing the world what it's meant to have them in my life and why other people in this world should have them in their lives. For as long I live, I am always going to give back to CCI in any way that I can.

Not only CCI has made a contribution to my life, but Bussani Mobility has been in my life as well for about 10 years. They provided my family with a van that I can easily get into with my chair. Now that I'm able to drive, Bussani modified a van for me. This is the first step for me to further my independence and my social life.

Canine Companions for Independence is the largest non-profit provider of trained assistance dogs, with five regional training centers across the country. Established in 1975, Canine Companions provides highly trained assistance dogs to children and adults with disabilities and is recognized worldwide for the excellence of its dogs, and quality and longevity of the matches it makes between dogs and people. There is no charge for the dog, its training and on-going follow-up services. For more information, visit www.cci.org or call 1-800-572-BARK.