

Lending a Helping

PAW





🐾 On a typical day, Tyndall will start the morning helping another dress.
 🐾 Then he will help make breakfast, pitch in to make the bed, assist with the laundry and fetch limitless items—and do every bit of it with devotion to his duty. When the day is done, he'll also “say prayers.” He’s not anyone’s father, butler, maid, nursing assistant, housekeeper or spouse. He is a life-changing companion. What’s more, he’s not even human. Tyndall is a yellow Labrador retriever.

🐾 Tyndall doesn’t exactly do all of the chores mentioned above just yet, but he’s well on his way to learning each of them. And, for a 3-month-old pup, the things he can do already are astonishing. Tyndall is named for a U.S. Air Force base, and it’s a fitting moniker for what he’ll be doing with his life. Currently, he’s a service dog in training. He won’t go into full service-dog mode until he is about 2 years old. But then he’ll join the ranks of the hundreds before him, such as Justice, Sergeant, Mustang, Captain and Summit, who are all giving some normalcy back to United States military heroes.

🐾 All of these dogs are full-fledged Patriot PAWS service dogs. Patriot PAWS is a nonprofit organization with the mission of training and providing high-quality service dogs to disabled veterans to help restore their physical and emotional independence. A certified service dog, including training, food and medical care, costs between \$20,000 and \$30,000 each, but the veteran recipient pays nothing.

🐾 It takes an army of donations and volunteers to ready just one dog for service. Recently, Linda Scoggin, a longtime service dog trainer and Patriot PAWS volunteer, along with trainers Kathleen McCullough and Kodi Pinnell, helped explain the process.

🐾 First, a suitable puppy must be acquired. Scoggin said these can come through donations. Pups can come from breeders, animal shelters and even rescue groups, but there are some breeds, such as Labrador retrievers, that are especially suitable as service dogs. It’s not a prerequisite that the dogs be purebred, but many times they are. Also, before the organization can accept a puppy for the program, the animal is carefully evaluated for specific traits to ensure it will be a likely candidate to graduate from the program.

🐾 Once a puppy is selected, it generally will go to a “puppy raiser” first to learn some basic manners such as how to walk properly on a leash, pick up their own leash, sit and stay. Then, when they are anywhere between four and six months old, have had all of their vaccinations and are deemed pretty good pups—they are sent to prison. Yes, indeed. These dogs are going to spend some time at either the Lane Murray Unit or Crain Unit in the women’s prison in Gatesville.

🐾 And they are welcomed by everybody, especially the inmates. You see, Gatesville is where these special dogs receive most of their in-depth training. Inmates who have been selected to participate in the program take responsibility for the care and training of the service dog. Each dog-in-training will live with an inmate around the clock. The inmates are trained and supervised by Patriot PAWS staff to follow a specific curriculum, with the goal of teaching each dog upward of 42 basic commands for them to assist the physically disabled with daily tasks.

🐾 Patriot PAWS trainers and their canine students enjoy an outing in Lindale. From left are Kodi Pinnell with Marti, Linda Scoggin with Truman and Skipper, and Kathleen McCullough with Tyndall.

FROM TOP: Kodi Pinnell and his newest student, Marti, show off their manners as Pinnell instructs Marti to “say her prayers.” Not to be outdone, Kathleen and Tyndall “pray” too. At just about 3 months old, Tyndall can already give most grown dogs a run for their money with his ability to perform basic commands.

At Gatesville, the job of training service dogs is a coveted position, because the women trainers live in dormitory-style quarters instead of basic cells. But the job at hand is also pretty demanding, as they take full responsibility for the well-being and training of the dog assigned to them. Each inmate takes charge of one dog for a month or so, and then the dogs are rotated. This is done for several reasons. No one dog should become too attached to any one trainer. But, just as important, each inmate may have different training skills for various commands. Rotating the animals ensures a good level of exposure. Cross-training like this also promotes an excellent team environment among the

women in the dorms and serves to reduce any potential competitive or territorial activity.

Working on the program gives the inmates an enormous amount of job satisfaction. With this program, they are given the ability to give back to the community while serving their sentence. Additionally, for many inmates, participation has given them employment opportunities once they’ve been released. Gatesville officials have said that Patriot PAWS has been one of the most successful work programs they’ve ever instituted, and as proof, they point to the fact that once released, an extremely low percentage of trainers have gone back to prison. “This program gives the inmates something to get up for every day, and it gives them a second chance,” Scoggin said.

Beyond the prisoners, there are many unsung heroes who work just as hard to produce well-rounded service dogs suitable as a helpmate for a disabled veteran. McCullough, Pinnell and Scoggin are among those with the unglamorous title of “puppy raiser.” Folks like them are the ones who start puppies off on the right foot.

Their job includes leash training and teaching a few basic commands before the dogs are sent to Gatesville. After a dog spends six to 10 months in intensive training with the inmates, it comes back out for another three to five months to live with a puppy raiser/trainer.

While the dogs have learned almost all of their commands solidly, living





outside of a prison environment is where they acquire important social skills and familiarization with household living and everyday activities.

“These dogs will be an extension of somebody, so they need to be very comfortable with the human lifestyle,” Scoggin explains. “By state law, they can go anywhere the public can go, when they are in training. We try to do as much socialization as we can—restaurants, grocery, public transportation, and so forth.” Each dog is outfitted with a vest that identifies them as service dogs in training. Scoggin said this part of the program is almost as much about training the public as it is about training the dogs.

The vests identify the dogs, but they also draw quite a bit of attention to the animals. At times, the trainers have been told their animals aren’t welcome in an establishment. That’s when the trainers use the opportunity to inform about Texas law. “As puppy raisers, part of our mission is to educate the public,” McCullough said. “Also, it is much better for us to meet the resistance than the disabled person with a dog. We carry an identification card, and it has the section of the state law that says we can’t be denied admittance.”

There’s another aspect to the education. “When a dog is in-training or in-service, you should always ask the person handling the dog before you try to pet it,” Scoggin said. “Trying to interact with the dog takes the attention away from their person, which could be dangerous.” Also, she said, “Don’t be disappointed if they say no. Sometimes it is just not a good time.”

Once the dogs have finished their public training and before they are turned over to their veteran, they’re taken back to Gatesville, where the veterans will then come to get their own training. Most veterans who are recipients of a dog have disabilities that are service-related. But some can actually be older veterans who have had strokes or another disability later in life. And some may not have physical disabilities, but be victims of post-traumatic stress disorder.

The veterans will work with several dogs to learn all of the basic commands, and each dog will work with several veterans. While the handlers and trainers may have some idea of which dog they are trying to place with which veteran, ultimately it is the dog that chooses the veteran. Virtually any dog that has mastered all of the basic skills can go to anybody, but some dogs excel at certain skills or have basic talents that may be more useful to one recipient. Also, personalities can come into play.

For example, a veteran may have a progressive disease that is causing him to lose his speech. The dog he gets needs to be able to understand the garbled commands. Then, as the veteran’s speech deteriorates, it must be able to understand and compensate more and more. Some dogs may be better at this than others.

Once a dog and a veteran are finally matched, both will

get more training to customize their partnership. Some of the tasks the dogs perform include picking up dropped items, opening and closing cabinets and doors, pulling wheelchairs, taking off shoes and socks, and helping with chores like laundry or bed-making. Even with the invaluable physical help the canines offer, another immeasurable benefit is the unconditional love and devotion that the dogs give to their veteran.

All the trainers say that despite the long hours they spend with their animals and money spent, they are rewarded by the knowledge that they’ve helped a veteran gain a level of independence again. It’s even worth the pain of having to give the animal up after spending so much time with it.

“You know going in that you will only have this dog for a while and you are training them to do something,” McCullough said. “The first man I helped raise a dog for had no arms. To see my dog go home with him and change his life ... that meant everything.”

While McCullough and Scoggin are seasoned dog trainers and have trained multiple service dogs, Pinnell, at 22, is pretty new at it. Pinnell met McCullough, who was friends with Scoggin, at Tyler Dog Obedience Club. He was intrigued and motivated by what the two were doing with Patriot PAWS and decided to give it a try. To that end, Pinnell recently trained and then turned over his first dog, Gunny.

“It was all so very sudden,” he said of giving the dog up. “You hand the leash over, and you are just dying inside, but the dog never even looks back. But as much as I might have wanted to keep him, somebody needs him so much more than I do.”

For Pinnell, it probably also helped that his hand did not remain leashless for long. He may have come home without Gunny, but he did bring back his next service dog-in-training. Her name is Marti.

For a veteran, the wait for a service dog is about a year. Then, they’ll spend quite a bit of time learning the basic commands and working with their dog. Later, the pair must pass a “public access” test to become a certified team to have the public access due all service dogs. McCullough summed up the feelings of the group when she talks about her work with Patriot PAWS, “I have trained dogs for 35 years, and this is the most rewarding thing I have EVER done.”

The headquarters for Patriot PAWS is in Rockwall, but the animals are donated to veterans across the nation. There is no government funding for this program, so all costs are covered by donations. All training is provided by the hard work of the inmates in Gatesville, and the donated time of puppy raisers like Pinnell, McCullough and Scoggin.

To learn more about Patriot PAWS, or to learn how to donate or become a volunteer, visit www.patriotpaws.org, call (972) 772-3282 or email patriotpaws@aol.com.

WCEC Named Regional Corporate Citizen of Year

Wood County Electric Cooperative has been honored by the East Texas Council of Governments with the Regional Corporate Citizen of the Year award. The award was presented at the ETCOG 84th Semi-Annual Board of Directors Meeting on March 22 at the Ben E. Keith Distribution Center in Palestine. The ETCOG Special Awards Program was designed to recognize the achievements of regional leaders who have contributed their time, energy and talents in advancing the cause of regional communication and cooperation in the 14-county East Texas Region. This is the 12th year for these awards.

The Regional Corporate Citizen of the Year award bestowed upon WCEC honors a corporate partner in East Texas that has contributed to the well-being of the East Texas region by exemplifying performance excellence.

Quitman City Administrator Michael E. Hall nominated WCEC for the award, remarking, "The Wood County Electric Cooperative is clearly of great service to the Quitman

community, this region and their field."

"While always focusing on its members' needs, WCEC also concentrates substantial effort and resources to the economic well-being of the East Texas region," said ETCOG Associate Director of Transportation Nanette C. Sanchez, who presented the award.

WCEC CEO and General Manager Debbie Robinson, joined by WCEC Board Secretary-Treasurer Lewis Young and WCEC Board Representative Cathy Roberts, received the award on behalf of all cooperative members, employees and board members.

"This award is truly a credit to our cooperative, and we are profoundly humbled and grateful for the recognition," Robinson said. "One of our cooperative tenets is to demonstrate concern for the community. To have that work recognized by the East Texas Council of Governments is gratifying on so many levels."

Others honored included: Tyler Mayor Barbara Bass,

who received the Regional Statesmanship award; Ed Brando, Homeland Security Advisory Committee chair, East Texas Medical Center, awarded the Regional Committee Service award; and Elizabeth Jones and Savannah Pacobit, who were co-awarded the ETCOG Employee of the Year.

ETCOG is a voluntary association of counties, cities, school districts and special districts within a 14-county East Texas region. ETCOG assists local governments in planning for common needs, cooperating for mutual benefit and coordinating for sound regional development. Established in 1970, ETCOG either directly, or through its contractors, provides programs and services for East Texas seniors, employers and job

seekers. ETCOG and its contractors also build the 911 emergency call delivery system, provide peace officer training and Homeland Security planning services, and deliver rural transportation services, business finance programs and environmental grant funding for the region.



From left are: Quitman City Administrator Michael E. Hall; Wood County EC Chief Operating Officer C.H. Campbell; Lindale City Council Member Robert Nelson, chairman of the ETCOG Executive Committee; WCEC CEO and General Manager Debbie Robinson; WCEC Board Secretary-Treasurer Lewis Young; and WCEC Board Representative Cathy Roberts.

community, Wood County and the East Texas region. The honor is mine in having been able to nominate them and should be ETCOG's in recognizing their achievements. We are thankful for all they do in providing electric service and development support. WCEC is truly a leader in their com-

Carrasco To Represent WCEC in Washington, D.C.

Mark Carrasco, a junior at Yantis High School, won Wood County Electric Cooperative's Youth Tour Essay Contest and will represent WCEC on the Government-in-Action Youth Tour in Washington, D.C., from June 14-22.

Carrasco was chosen by an independent judge based on his essay submission, which outlined the cooperative principle of Democratic Member Control and the importance of giving a voice to all members of the cooperative.



Carrasco is the son of Juan and Tammy Ayala of Yantis. He is involved in sports, including basketball, baseball and track. He also serves as a leader of his First Baptist Church youth group and as a youth leader for National Prayer at the Pole. Carrasco has been nationally recognized by the United States Achievement Academy for his English, honor roll and leadership skills by U.S. Rep. Jeb Hensarling.

"I'm so proud of Mark for all of his accomplishments, the way he conducts himself and the leadership he portrays at both home and school," Tammy Ayala said. "I am so thankful to Wood County Electric Coop-

erative for giving Mark this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Carrasco will travel to Washington, D.C., with about 1,500 other Youth Tour participants from across the country. He will have the opportunity to meet congressional representatives and visit historic memorials and cultural centers in our nations' capital.

"The Youth Tour is an exceptional opportunity for Mark, and we know he will represent our cooperative, East Texas and Yantis with distinction," said WCEC CEO and General Manager Debbie Robinson. "As a past attendee of our East Texas Rural Electric Youth Seminar, Mark emerged as a standout. Because of this, we are confident he'll use this latest opportunity to further hone his leadership skills."



Smart home landscaping can lower your electric bills. Trees on the east and west sides of your home provide shade—and reduce your cooling costs—during hot summer months. Shade for your air conditioner can save 10 percent of your cooling costs. And by adding vegetation to the north side of your home, you can block winter winds that trigger higher heating costs.



SALES TAX HOLIDAY

Save on Appliances
Memorial Day Weekend

Texas' fifth annual Energy Star Sales Tax Holiday this Memorial Day weekend is a great time to purchase new energy-efficient appliances without paying state or local sales taxes on qualifying items.

By purchasing an Energy Star-rated appliance during the tax holiday, you will not only save the sales tax, you will also save on your monthly utility bills by reducing your water and energy use.

The Energy Star Sales Tax Holiday begins Saturday, May 26, and runs through Memorial Day, Monday, May 28. The tax savings apply to the following appliances and household equipment bearing the Energy Star label:

- Central or room air conditioners priced at \$6,000 or less
- Refrigerators priced at \$2,000 or less
- Ceiling fans
- Incandescent and fluorescent lightbulbs
- Clothes washers
- Dishwashers
- Dehumidifiers
- Programmable thermostats

Visit www.texaspowerfulsmart.org for details about the tax holiday.

