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Exceptional dogs for exceptional people

Posted by [joseph.pena](#) On May 22, 2009 @ 3:22 pm In [Columns](#), [Home & Garden](#), [Lifestyle](#) | [No Comments](#)

Editor's note: This is one of our submissions as part of SDNN's contest seeking content from members of our community. Submit your own entry to story@sdnn.com

Service dogs assisting owners is a common sight in public places, such as restaurants and malls. These well-behaved dogs have to complete quite a bit of training, and one place the training is done is in Oceanside.

Oceanside's [Canine Companions for Independence Regional Training Center](#) [2]

(CCI) was founded in 1975, headquartered in Santa Rosa, Calif. The local training center – which is one of five in the U.S. – was opened in 1996.



[1]

Brady Sherman with his parents Damon and Patty and their newest family member, Palo, and their friend Lance Weir, a CCI South West board member, and his dog Sateen

Training begins with dogs that are bred and raised by trainers for approximately 15 months. The dogs are returned to a CCI training center for six to nine months of professional instruction. It takes about two years of training before a dog is ready to go home with an owner who needs it.

Last week, one San Diego family – the Shermans – graduated from the two-week program, and was able to take a training dog home.

Brady Sherman, who is 12 years old, was diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy when he was 18 months old. In order to complete the canine companion team training, Brady's parents, Damon, a San Diego police officer, and Patty, a school teacher, took time off from work to live at the Oceanside facility, so they could complete the program.

"Last May we filled out our application and we were put on the wait list in October," said Patty. "The wait is based on a match between owner's needs and a dog's temperament."

Dogs are trained for one of four jobs: to be service dogs which assist independent adults with physical disabilities; to be skilled companion dogs to help children and adults with physical and/or development disabilities; to be facility dogs who work at the side of professional caregivers, educators, or skilled volunteers in fields such as physical therapy, hospice, and special education; or to be hearing dogs to help adults who are deaf or hard of hearing by alerting them to important everyday sounds.

CCI is lead by CEO Cory Hudson and has an annual budget of \$13 million. One of its sponsors is

Disneyland VoluntEARS, which presented CCI with a check for \$10,000 at last week's graduation. In addition to raising all funds through donations, Cory mentioned their next challenge: "We've been trying to get on *Oprah* to raise awareness at the national level."

The facility has a wide range of training aids from ropes on doors (so dogs can learn how to open them) to live rabbits used to teach the dogs how to ignore distractions. The class made several field trips to a local mall, restaurant and the harbor to learn how to behave in public. Actually, it is really training for the owners. As the most recent class's official speaker Damon said Saturday, "It's intimidating to begin the training knowing that any problems during the training are our fault – not the dog's."

The Shermans' class graduated nine companion teams. Graduation was no small event, with an estimated 300 people and 80 dogs in attendance. Despite the large number of dogs, there wasn't a single bark heard. But training isn't quite over yet. In about six weeks, the Shermans will return to CCI for their final testing, certification, and fine tuning.

Joe Moreno, a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, is the president of Adjix, which allows people to advertise on Twitter. Joe lives in Carlsbad with his wife, Laura, and their beagle Cocoa.

Article printed from San Diego News Network: <http://www.sdn.com>

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[2] Canine Companions for Independence Regional Training Center: <http://www.cci.org>

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