

## 2018 Spring Team Training Making ECAD History

ECAD, Educated Canines Assisting with Disabilities, is currently holding the largest ever Team Training Session in its 23 history! At the conclusion of the two-week period, which began on April 11 and will conclude with graduation on April 25, eight clients and eight Service Dogs will have been paired. The normal class is four. The graduation will take place at 6pm at Camp Wahnee in Torrington and the public is invited to attend.

“The Service Dogs in Training were ready. The clients were ready. My co-instructors and I were ready. So, I said, let’s do this,” said Lu Picard, co-founder of ECAD with her husband, Dale Picard, and director of programming. “It is never too early to pair a fully educated Service Dog with a person who needs this assistance so that they can begin to live a fuller, safer, more independent life.”

The eight clients represent a wide range of visible and invisible disabilities, including Ehlers Danlos Syndrome (EDS), PTSD and Autism. EDS is a group of genetic connective tissue disorders that are manifested in loose joints that cause balance issues, chronic pain and osteoarthritis, which can lead to a lack of mobility.

Due to the needs of the clients, all three of ECAD’s specially designed programs are being implemented. The Service Dogs placed will meet the needs of four children with Autism through its Canine Magic Program, the needs of a Veteran through Project HEAL, and the needs of three with physical disabilities through Open Doors. The clients range in age from five to forty-nine, and come from WVA, RI, NY, NJ, ME and CT.

Each ECAD Service Dog has been taught to respond to 89 specific commands that will lead to the opening of doors, the retrieval of objects, help with the laundry or grocery shopping, being fitted with a brace to help with walking, and so much more. The Service Dogs paired with the children with Autism will know how to keep their charge safe, staying put for example, preventing the child from bolting, or remaining calm during outbursts. The Service Dog paired with the Veteran will recognize the onset of panic attacks, or nightmares, and be able to calm their person so that they can once again be motivated to interact with the outside world.

During the two-week Team Training session, Picard and her instructors, fine-tune the commands that will be most needed by a specific client. The group as a whole will visit public spaces in the Torrington and Waterbury area, malls, restaurants, theaters, and libraries. They do this in order to pass the public access certification test that is a must before they can graduate.

“Make no mistake, it is hard work, emotional work, too, but it is fun as well. The individuals are all going through the same thing, and they become mutually

supportive. It is always a beautiful thing. After all these years, I never tire of seeing the process, particularly when I know the almost miraculous outcome,” Picard said.

ECAD is a 501 (c) (3) not for profit. To date, ECAD has placed 350 Service Dogs in over twenty states. ECAD relies on donations from individual donors and corporations, as well as grants from foundations, to cover its expenses. The organization has regularly received the highest rating from Guidestar and Charity Navigator. ECAD is currently in the final stages of building a state of the art, ADA compliant, Canine Education and Wellness Center on its campus in Winsted, CT

Graduation at Camp Wahnee starts at 6pm, with doors opening at 5:30pm. Refreshments will be served following the ceremony. Camp Wahnee is located at 128 Wahnee Road, Torrington, CT,

For volunteer opportunities and additional information about ECAD, go to [www.ecad1.org](http://www.ecad1.org).