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## Neighbors

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### Conway resident advocates for fellow service dog handlers

Thursday, 18 May 2017

by Callie Sterling

Patricia Heath of Conway is a determined service dog owner with an agenda. She has taken her concerns to the state level in the form of the recently passed Patricia Heath Act, which assures Arkansans with disabilities can be accompanied by a service animal.



Patricia Heath along with her service dogs: Izabella (left) and Micha Russell (right). (Callie Sterling photo)

Patricia Heath along with her service dogs: Izabella (left) and Micha Russell (right). (Callie Sterling photo)

“The Patricia Heath Act covers all types of service dogs such as medical alert, psychiatric, seizure alert, diabetic alert, seizure response, Autism, mobility and more,” Heath said.

The bill was sponsored by Sen. Jason Rapert and Rep. David Meeks.

“The idea originally came from the other states that had state laws to cover service dogs in training,” Heath said. “By reading their laws and using them as a guide, I was able to help create a similar one for Arkansas. The bill has been amended some throughout the voting process. Our next step would be to figure out a compromise

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Donna and John Ben Scherrey of Conway are our Couple of the Month, in celebration of this week's St. Joseph Bazaar! [501lifemag.com/index.php?option=...](http://501lifemag.com/index.php?option=...)



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## Events in the 501

### MacArthur museum offer travel grants for schools

The MacArthur Museum of Arkansas Military History is offering travel grants to help students visit the museum for interactive programs that enhance the teaching of World War I and II, as well as learn about the historic Arsenal Building and Civil War Arkansas.

### Cabot Lions Club plans Clothing Drive Challenge

The Cabot Lions Club will present its Clothing Drive Challenge on Saturday, Aug. 12, at the Cabot Farmer's Market.

### Navy Band Cruisers to perform Aug. 19

America's Navy is coming to Little Rock, one of 14 cities in four states to host a performance by the U.S. Navy Band during its 2017 tour - one of the signature outreach programs of the U.S. Navy.

### Special exhibit at MacArthur Museum

The MacArthur Museum of Arkansas Military History is hosting a traveling exhibit about the National War Fund, an agency created by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1942 to aid countries and peoples devastated by war.

and a solution to stop people from pretending and posing their pets as a service dog or as a service dog in training.”

Heath highly discourages people from pretending their pets are service dogs.

“People do not seem to realize that you can’t just go and put a vest on a dog for it to be a service dog or service dog in training,” Heath said. “Service dogs have anywhere from one to three years of constant training every single day. You can’t go make your dog a service dog just because you want to. You do it because you need it like I do, which has really helped me tremendously in more ways than one.”

Heath was greatly encouraged by the late Judge Russell L. Roberts, who passed away in 2010, as well as the late Sen. Stanley Russ, who passed away earlier this year.

“The late Sen. Russ and Judge Roberts instilled in me the courage to continue to fight for equality for all disabled service dog handlers,” Heath said. “I will continue to stand up for our civil rights on the state level.”

Fighting for rights for individuals with disabilities is not something that is new for Heath.

“I have been a Disability Rights Activist since I was 16 years old,” Heath said. “I worked with Sen. Bob Graham of Florida to push to get the ADA Act signed into law because no place would hire me because of my seizures at that time. Because of the ADA, I was finally able to get a job after it was passed.”

Today, Heath has two service dogs of her own — Izabella and Micha Russell. Both dogs are Miniature Australian Shepherds. Izabella began assisting Heath in 2013, and Micha joined her in 2015.

“I got Izabella in 2013 from a breeder in Arkansas,” Heath said. “I got Micha in 2015 from the same breeder. His middle name Russell is after Senator Stanley Russ and Judge Russell Lynn ‘Jack’ Roberts who were mentors to me.”

The pair of Australian Shepherds provide assistance to Heath by reminding her to take her medication, check her blood pressure and comforting her during anxiety attacks.

“Izabella will get my attention by climbing on me and whining when it is time for me to take my medicines,” Heath said. “When I have an anxiety attack, she will lay across my lap if I am sitting down, or put her front paws across my lap until I get through my attack. She also alerts me to check my blood pressure. She also helps me with my PTSD, and that is part of the reason I can go out in public more.”

Izabella has completed obedience classes and has completed the AKC Canine Good Citizen (CGC) program. Micha Russell has completed puppy obedience, CGC and CGC Advanced. Currently, Micha is working toward CGC Urban so he can prepare for an additional upcoming certification test. In the future, Heath would like Micha to complete the Personal Access Training test.

Heath wants to educate others about how to react when a service dog is present. It is important to not pet service dogs. Heath stresses the importance of respecting the handler by speaking to the handler directly, rather than looking at the service dog.

“I also hope to spread service dog etiquette tips,” Heath said. “I hope that more parents will teach their kids to not pet service dogs,” Heath said. “If you see someone with a service dog, do not talk to the dog or touch it. Speak to the handler of the service dog and talk straight to them and not the dog. A lot of handlers do not like when people talk to the dog instead of the handler themselves.”

Heath is making positive progress for service dogs and their handlers a little at a time and intends to continue her efforts.