

Applejack's Extraordinary Career, PSW



San Diego Hope member Dori McLaurin had big plans, and she needed a big dog. Motivated by a shoulder injury of her own, she wanted to develop an animal-assisted aquatic therapy program for others. Dori found enthusiastic supporters in Newf lovers Don and Jeanette Tate, who gave her Applejack, an 8-month-old Newfoundland—a dog bred for water rescue—to launch the effort.

Applejack matured into a lovable, 180-pound adult, perfect for aquatic therapy—except for a surprising aversion to swimming! What he did do well was connect with people in need of emotional support. And so began his remarkable 7-year career in therapy and crisis response. From Children's Hospital to assisted living, skilled nursing and Alzheimer's facilities, Applejack delighted patients, families and staff alike. And then, in early 2001, San Diego was rocked by two fatal school shootings. Believing Applejack could help the traumatized survivors, Dori took him to both campuses. To her surprise, the big guy drew not only students, but teachers, counselors, even police officers. Some sobbed into his fur. Others simply said thanks.

Soon after, Dori learned about HOPE AACR, and Applejack became the first Newfoundland certified in crisis response. As a HOPE team, Dori and Applejack responded to multiple disasters. When catastrophic wildfires hit San Diego in late 2003, Applejack worked day after day at the fire base camp, comforting hundreds of exhausted firefighters and even greeting President George W. Bush. Two years later, when Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, Applejack was still on the job, helping de-stress evacuees flown to a shelter provided by the San Diego Red Cross. But he was eight now and slowing down. Dori began to wonder when she should retire him.

Then came word that Don Tate had died. At the family's request, Dori and Applejack both attended the funeral. Never had the big Newfy's crisis response skills been so appreciated as by this grieving family, who had made his journey with Dori possible. Realizing her beloved partner's career had come full circle, Dori retired Applejack that day. He responded just once more, coming out of retirement in late 2006 to lead a contingent of HOPE teams at a public memorial service for five fallen firefighters. But Dori and even other HOPE members continued to hear kudos from people whom this very special Newf had touched in some way. No doubt, the many memories of Applejack and his magic will linger for a long, long time to come.

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