

Cinder, Canine partner of Pam Bertz, PSW 1999 - 2012

“Cinder was born to be a Therapy and Crisis Response Team member as she is a natural for this work and is totally engaging,” says Lois Abrams (Psychologist, CERT member, Therapy & Crisis Response Team member with her Cavalier King Charles Spaniels Duke & Romeo), and for awhile was part of the Huntington Beach CERT Canine Crisis Response Team, attending most of the CERT classes for 2 years. For 9 years as a Therapy Dog, she brought comfort, support, smiles, laughs, and compassion to those in the communities she visited. At Youth Shelters she helped kids cope with their emotions after being taken from their homes for one reason or another; at Hoag Hospital she helped patients and their families take their minds off their pain and concerns; seniors at the Sunrise Senior complex and the Alzheimer’s Day Care Center in Huntington Beach enjoy reminiscing and just getting a little non-judgmental love. And while attending CERT classes with her mom, Pam, she helped 2 CERT trainees get over their fear of dogs, and last year helped teach the CERT Pet Preparedness class. On another occasion she accompanied her mom to court (on request of a Judge in Newport) and was put to work by that Judge, she helped a distraught defendant get over her nervousness of being in court – a job she accomplished in 10 minutes of quiet compassion. She remained in the courtroom for the morning where she was available to stand beside others having a difficult time. She also helped children and their parents deal with the loss of a loved one at Kid’s Grief Camps sponsored by the New Hope Grief Support Group for 3 years.

As a HOPE Crisis Response dog for 7 years she has brought comfort, support and compassion to those affected by a tragedy, crisis, or disaster. These have included many “fire camps” providing firefighters and camp workers with a feeling of home and thanking them for their efforts; five “Line of Duty” memorials; victims of crisis’ such as the Meritage Salon shooting in Seal Beach, and to children after a campus shooting at Kelly Elementary School in Carlsbad; teenagers experiencing the “Every 15 Minutes” programs in high schools in Fountain Valley, Temecula, Murrieta, Corona, Riverside, and San Bernardino; and just recently participated in the UC Irvine Campus’ “Take Back the Night,” giving comfort to all those who attended; and so much more.

Cinder continued to be an ambassador for canine therapy and showing how these dogs can work their magic in all kinds of situations. At the UCI Child Development Center, they are conducting a 4 year study to learn whether pet therapy can help children with ADHD (Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) improve their social skills and control their symptoms. “Cinder, a golden retriever with a sweet face and slow gait, reclines on a dog bed at the UC Irvine Child Development Center as, one by one, half a dozen 8- and 9-year-olds deliver pats and hugs. One boy puts his arms around her in a warm embrace; another gently curls up at her side. From behind a two-way mirror, center director Sabrina Schuck watches closely. "All of these kids have attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. They're an aggressive group. A couple of them are at risk of suspension from their school," she says. "Yet they're calm and engaged." The reason, she says, is Cinder — and other therapy dogs.” (Quoted from the Zot Zine, UCI’s Online Magazine). The study consists of twice weekly skills classes for 12 weeks. There are two 12 week sessions each year, with new students each time. The prior students are followed to see if the progress they have made continues (and so far it has). The skills consist of sitting still for periods of time

during the lessons being taught, not rocking or “surfing” their chairs, raising their hands to answer a question or participate – without calling out, working together in groups, using “nice sayings” and encouraging their classmates, controlling their anger or disappointment, and paying attention and staying on task. The more of these skills they can perform or use during the class, they are rewarded with individual time with the dogs (3 for each 12 week session). They also have regular reading and journal writing sessions with the dogs. Also part of the program has the kids “teach” the dogs commands like sit, down, stay and come. The dogs don’t always respond to the commands on the first try, which teaches patience and helps the kids understand what their parents feel when they do not do what their parents have asked. "The (dogs) take down the children's defenses," Schuck says. "Those who have social challenges can relate to them. “(A) Mission Viejo resident whose son, Dillon, is in the study, says there has been a marked improvement in his behavior. ‘It's had an amazing effect, she says. He's able to sit still more, and he's easier to control. He's definitely calmed down a lot. And he's more assertive in class. His voice is stronger.’ Dillon has also gone from disliking dogs to adoring them, his mother reports, and he looks forward to the sessions rather than dreading them.” (Id. Zot Zine) (Note: many ADHD kids are on medication to help control their behaviors, however, none of the children in this study are on medication.)

A CERT-ified thank you goes out to Cinder, a four-legged, furry “Community” Emergency (Crisis) Response & Therapy Team canine, says the Huntington Beach CERT Newsletter.

She also loved to travel and see new things. She got to experience the grandeur of Yellowstone Park, Yosemite, and Mammoth with her sister Gina, who passed in January. She also loved to go to Colorado in the mountains where she & Gina could run off leash, swim in the lake, visit with the horses, and hang out at night around the campfire.

We will miss your kind and loving spirit.