



KENT COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

701 Ball Avenue, N.E. • Grand Rapids • Michigan • 49503



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 18, 2015

Contact: Lisa LaPlante – 616.632.7182

Search and Rescue Dog Saved Thanks to Free Eye Exam *Free Eye Exams for Working Search and Rescue Dogs May 22*

GRAND RAPIDS – Lego is a five year old Portuguese Water Dog, certified by the National Search Dog Alliance (NSDA) as a Search and Rescue working dog. Lego has been on dozens of rescues with Kent County Search and Rescue (KCSAR) and K-9 One Missing Person and Response Team since 2010. Last May, when the opportunity to get a free eye exam came up, Jilian Rakow nearly passed on the idea.

“I was out of state, so I asked a friend to take Lego for me,” Jilian recalls. “The routine eye exam showed something was wrong, so I made a follow-up appointment. There was a tumor on Lego’s left iris, and the only way to know if it was benign or malignant was to remove the eye to get to the tumor.”

It may have been months before Jilian would have known about the tumor, if it weren’t for Dr. Cassandra Bliss working at an American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists (ACVO) National Service Animal Eye Exam event. This philanthropic effort encourages members to donate their time, staff and services to provide free screening eye exams to qualified Service Animals. Over 38,000 Service Animals have received these free screening exams over the past seven years nationwide.

Dr. Cassandra Bliss will be volunteering for this special event once again this year. Friday, May 22, she will provide free eye exams to service dogs at the Kent County Sheriff’s Department, 701 Ball NE in Grand Rapids. Registration for the event this year is already full. Service dogs receiving exams are working for a program or organization, or are currently enrolled in a formal training program.

Dr. Bliss consulted with Dr. Bobbi Zech, DVM of Grand River Vet last year after finding the tumor. They saw that it was growing extremely fast, and was becoming dangerous to his health. Dr. Zech decided to remove Lego’s eye, in order to remove the tumor. “Thankfully, the tumor was benign, but it was growing so fast. By removing it, we saved the potential for infection and damage,” Jilian says. “Just a few months later, Lego was recertified through K-9 ONE, and still holds his NSDA certification. He is still mission-ready and can work beautifully.” Currently, Lego and Jilian are on leave from the teams as Jilian finishes graduate school.

The Eight Annual National Service Animal Eye Exam event screening-wellness eye exams for Service Animals include dogs that provide the following services: guide, hearing assistance, drug detection, police/military, search and rescue, therapy, and those assisting people with disabilities other than blindness. “It is absolutely essential that we maintain working dogs’ health,” Jilian says. “When we have an opportunity like this, we must take it. Lego would not have recovered as quickly or easily if we hadn’t got him help when we did.”

MEDIA NOTE: You are welcome to attend the event Friday, or if you would like an interview with Jilian and Lego in advance, contact Lisa at Lisa.LaPlante@kentcountymi.gov. Again, please note that registration for the event this year is already full.

###