Therapy & Service Animal Seminars

LOGAN — Utah State University’s Department of Animal, Dairy and Veterinary Sciences and the School of Veterinary Medicine co-sponsor two public seminars on the benefits of therapy and service animals on Feb. 5 and 12 in USU’s Merrill-Cazier Library Room 154 at 1:10 p.m.

The Feb. 5 seminar will be presented by Linda Weiskopf from Canine Companions for Independence. The Feb. 12 seminar will be presented by Kathy Klotz from Intermountain Therapy Animals. Both organizations are nonprofit and aim to help those with disabilities and other needs become more independent by providing trained animals for assistance.

The differences between service/assistance animals and therapy animals will be discussed in the seminars. Service/assistance animals have full-time careers and are specifically trained to help one person, while therapy animals and their owners volunteer as teams visiting hospitals, healthcare and educational institutions to provide therapeutic assistance to many different clients.

Weiskopf’s lecture topic is, “Assistance Dogs — They Are Not All Seeing Eye Dogs.” She is a volunteer puppy raiser for Canine Companions for Independence and is currently raising her eighth puppy for the organization. She will bring Canine Companions puppies to her lecture and will discuss how assistance dogs have helped residents become more independent.

Klotz, executive director of Intermountain Therapy Animals, will discuss “Not Just Warm and Fuzzy: The Proven Value of Including Animals in Therapeutic Regimens.” Klotz has worked with ITA since 1997 and has helped it grow to become one of the largest organizations of its kind in the world. One of ITA’s programs, the Reading Education Assistance Dogs® (R.E.A.D.®) program, has spread nationally and worldwide. The program pairs children with therapy dogs to read to, and studies have shown the children benefit both personally and in their reading skills because of the program.

According to Dirk Vanderwall, head of the USU Department of Animal, Dairy and Veterinary Sciences, the lectures accompany an elective class for veterinary students on animal-assisted activities and therapies. "We are excited to have representatives from both organizations come to USU and broaden our perspective on animal-assisted activities that create independence for individuals, and we are pleased to be able to share this with the local community," he said. "The ADVS Department is currently developing an equine-assisted activities and therapies curriculum within our program."

The lectures are free and open to the public, and those interested in training therapy and service animals are especially encouraged to attend.