



Stash is Shiela's third Collie for Mobility and Support.

Going Places

This fancier provides big support outside the show ring.

By Leslie Crane Rugg and Eva Saks

Christmas trees aren't the only homegrown specialty in the mountains of the Pacific Northwest. In Kings Valley, Oregon, Leslie Rappaport successfully breeds and trains her remarkable "Collies for Mobility and Support," along with her AKC champion Collies. In fact, sometimes these dogs are one and the same.

What are Collies for Mobility and Support? They're the service dogs Rappaport trains especially to help people with problems ambulating. Focusing on teamwork between person and dog, Rappaport trains these Collies to make getting around less stressful, less exhausting, safer—and generally more empowering.

It's a different kind of success than that found in the show ring. As she puts it: "If each partner has the skills and the love to support the other's efforts, give themselves to the other, provide for the other's needs, and if together they are a happy and smoothly functioning team, then I have succeeded."

Rappaport has trained service dogs for clients affected by cerebral palsy, head injury, hearing loss, autism, multiple sclerosis, post-traumatic

stress disorder, seizures, stroke, Alzheimer's, and West Nile virus. She is committed to giving her clients, and her dogs, the best possible support.

A Client and a Blessing

Rappaport gave her Blessing to client Shiela—literally. Shiela had an active life, a fulfilling job, and multiple sclerosis. When buying groceries became a physical and emotional challenge, Shiela reached out to the Delta Society and through them found Rappaport.

The trainer paired Shiela with Blessing, a blue-merle titled performance Collie. Blessing had already achieved success in herding and backpacking, as well as therapy-dog certification and Canine Good Citizen®. Now she would supply the strength Shiela's body no longer had. With Blessing, Shiela could conquer the world! They even went on a Caribbean cruise with Shiela's husband.

Blessing and her successor Segal eventually retired, becoming cherished family members, permanently off-duty. Stash is Shiela's new partner, specifically selected by Rappaport. She pays attention to the details the ever-active Shiela might overlook.

The Collies of Kings Valley

Since the early 1970s, Rappaport and her mother, Eva—until her recent death—bred and showed 12 generations of Kings Valley Collies to AKC championships and performance titles. Their record includes nearly a hundred champions, four Register of Merit (ROM) dams, and one almost-ROM sire (he missed qualifying by one offspring). The Rappaports were five-time winners of the Collie Club of America's Smooth Collie "Breeder of the Year" award.

In performance events, Kings Valley Collies have titled in all levels of obedience, all levels of rally, all levels of herding, ranch dog, wilderness search-and-rescue level 4, Masters-level agility, tracking, utility, backpacking, carting, and will soon achieve the ultimate—an OTCH title.

Even more impressive is the contribution Kings Valley Collies have made as therapy dogs, graduated working guide dogs, seizure-alert dogs, autism-aid dogs, and now, balance and mobility dogs.

Kings Valley Collies are global citizens too, in shows and in service everywhere from Israel to the Netherlands to Germany. How did Rappaport make a connection with dogs so strong it would take her Collies around the world?

Raised by Dogs

This bond goes back to a Collie named Angel and a German Shepherd named Inca. Rappaport says, "I was

raised by Angel from the time I was 2 years old. Mom was so heartbroken after Angel died that she couldn't have another Collie right away." So Inca entered Rappaport's life. Angel was naturally gentle but Inca was shy. Angel taught Rappaport about love and trust while Inca showed her what worry and stress could do. They stoked Rappaport's passion for understanding the nature of dogs and bringing out the best in them. By her teens, she was training all the neighborhood dogs—and their owners.

Selecting for Service

Rappaport considers Collies perfect service dogs because of their innate desire to please. As Angel and Inca taught her, picking the right dog for this work is crucial. She starts her selection process early, scrutinizing every pup for potential in conformation or performance, or as a working or service dog.

She chooses "puppies that are confident rather than boisterous, observant, loving, responsive, enjoy contact, lead the way on walks, and explore new spaces with confidence."

She begins their serious training by the time they are 6 months old. Formal training begins at a year, integrating the foundation and life skills they've already learned with obedience training. At 18 months, they graduate to harness training, which lasts another six months. (All her service dogs work in harness.) As the final step in the process, clients come to Kings Valley for two weeks of team training with their new dogs.

Throughout the training period, Rappaport takes the candidates to different environments—town streets, school yards, doctors' offices and banks, hillsides, stairways, elevators. The dogs meet cats, kids, birds, and squirrels. They are tested and proofed for every situation.

Thinking Positive

At every step of the way, Rappaport encourages each Collie. From puppyhood, any behavior valuable in service work is rewarded by Rappaport with her

"marker word"—"Good!"

As puppies, training is a game. As adults, training has become a way of life. Rappaport never says no to her dogs, nor do they ever suffer negative consequences for a mistake. She uses only positive reinforcement, which teaches puppies to trust people. The dogs are rewarded consistently for appropriate behavior so they remain confident and happy.

Make Me a Match

Rappaport's success is attributable not only to her way with dogs but to her first-rate "matchmaking." She has an impressive knack for pairing dog and person. Rappaport cites the partnership between Scott and Ramsey, a sable and white rough: "Scott's happy good nature and cautious, labored, uneven stride were a perfect match for my big, solid, steady, and patient Ramsey, whose go along/get along personality allowed him to happily adjust to Scott's personal rhythm."

Meanwhile, Devin, who worked in a busy downtown, needed a dog who could handle trains, buses, and city streets. Andy, a tri smooth, proved expert in guiding Devin. Once he refused to continue on a path Devin had chosen, standing in place at the top of a hill. Finally Devin realized she was accidentally holding his leash instead of his harness. She

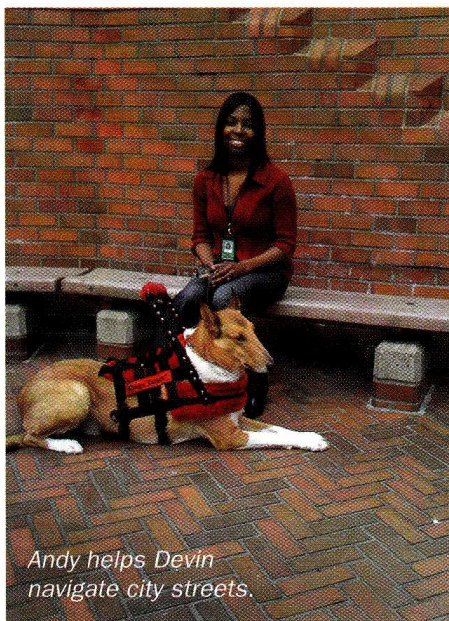
corrected herself and Andy, back in harness, moved forward.

Myah was only 8 when she was in a car accident, resulting in a head injury and a

crushed pelvis. Four years later, she walked again. Partnered with her Collie, Winston, she can now safely manage stairs. Octogenarian Fred leaped over ditches again with his Collie, Sean. Having a mobility Collie restored Fred's vigor as well as his capabilities.

"We all do the best we can," Rappaport concludes. "People and dogs." **GZ**

Leslie Crane Rugg and Eva Saks collaborate on print and media projects related to dogs and culture. Full disclosure: Leslie owns a Kings Valley Collie.



Andy helps Devin navigate city streets.