

LIFESTYLES

# PET THERAPY

## Doza the dog spreads love at Summit Place

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A fur-covered bundle of love visited Summit Place Assisted Living Center on Monday.

Doza, a four-month-old Rottweiler, met residents. One of his owners, Sue Shuler, accompanied the puppy on his rounds.

Shuler and her husband Richard Shuler founded the not-for-profit Friendly Pet Therapy and are assisted by Bill Lovern. The Shulers also own Shuler's Warrior Kennels.

While it was Doza's first visit, the Shulers and Lovern are not new to pet therapy. The couple first brought their dogs to Summit Place when Richard Shuler's father Vernon Shuler was a resident. After he died staff member Judy Lee asked them to continue their visits. They brought Big Foot who is now known as the "backbone" of the pet therapy.

On Monday afternoon resident Tom Smith was the first to greet Doza. As he petted the dog, Eddys Ware made her way over to meet the canine. She and Clara Twitty enjoyed Doza and had questions for Shuler.

They wanted to know where Doza sleeps - he has his own bed in the house. How much he weighs - over 35 pounds. Was his tail docked or was he born with it short and stubby - it's docked.

The two women laughed as Doza hunted for his

rawhide chew. Shuler hid the toy after she assessed if Doza wanted to share it. He didn't but was willing to let others play with his stuffed vampire Halloween toy.

All therapy dogs have some toys they are willing to share and others that are off limits. It's Shuler's job to figure this out now.

She brought him to Summit Place today for socialization, a chance to get him used to new people, wheelchairs, large doors and other things he'll find in a residential center. Doza also starts to learn the rules now.

At age six months Shuler will begin preparing Doza for the AKC designation Canine Good Citizen. If he passes that test, Doza will be eligible to work on therapy dog certification.

Doza was the first of his litter to approach humans. He prefers them to dogs now, Shuler said. That makes him a good candidate for pet therapy.

Shuler, Doza, Judy Lee and volunteer Reagan Childers made their way down the hall for a visit with Lou Smith. Doza was eager to shake hands with her.

"You've got big feet and no shoes to go on them," Mrs. Smith joked.

Next the group took Doza to the Alzheimer's unit. There several residents quickly warmed to their four-legged guest.

The Shulers and Lovern also bring pet therapy to the schools. Exceptional chil-

dren's instructor Joel Adkins says Bigfoot's visits are therapeutic, educational and enjoyable. The children learn how to approach and care for an animal.

They also donate some dogs to law enforcement agencies for training as police canines.

Not all the therapy dogs are Rottweilers. Last week Taco, a two-year-old Chihuahua, accompanied Sue Shuler and Lovern to Summit Place for their fair.

While a Chihuahua rarely frightens anyone, some folks are leery of Rottweilers. Shuler says the therapy dogs are ambassadors for their breed and other large breeds.

For more information, call 704-730-9803 or email rot-tiesrus@juno.com.



Lou Smith and Doza get to know one other.

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Eddys Ware and Doza visit at Summit Place on Monday.

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