



Evaluator News

A Very Special CGC Program

Linda Shannon-Chaillet is an AKC CGC Evaluator who is the dog training instructor for the Best Friends 4-H Group in Benton Harbor, Michigan. Best Friends is a group of remarkable young people who have disabilities and a love of dogs. Best Friends members learn to care for their dogs, provide basic training, and they are learning the basics of AKC activities such as CGC, obedience and agility. Each year, Best Friends participates in the Berrien County Youth Fair, where everyone brings their dog and shows what they have learned. Linda has shared the story of the recent Best Friends Pet Fair with us on pages 2-3.



In the photo (to the left), a child with autism and physical disabilities takes her dog through the CGC Test. Autism is a developmental disability that may be characterized by difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions, and play or leisure activities.

After 3 years of coming to Best Friends dog training, this young lady recently won the honor of being the "Reserved Grand Champion" in Best Friends agility. She got a ribbon and some applause that made everyone proud. But perhaps the best sign of what dog training has done for this determined handler could be seen when she accidentally dropped her leash during the competition. She picked up the leash, sized up the situation, and proceeded to finish the course. For a child with autism, recognizing a mistake and correcting it without being prompted is a major accomplishment.

Note: Linda Shannon-Chaillet stresses that the AKC CGC standards are adhered to in all of the CGC Tests for Best Friends. In cases where participants or dogs are not ready to pass the test, they may be given a Best Friends certificate for participation.

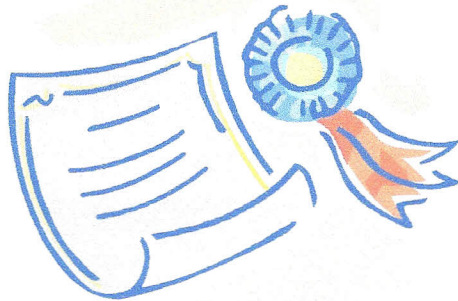
See Linda's article below on Best Friends 4-H Club and the Berrien County Youth Fair.

By Linda M. Shannon-Chaillet, AKC CGC Approved Evaluator

Best Friends 4-H Club Co-Coordinator

Berrien County 4-H Spring Achievement Dog Chairperson

Berrien County Youth Fair Disabled Exhibitors with Dogs Chairperson



Welcome to the Berrien County Youth Fair Dog Department 9 – Division 2; Disabled Exhibitors with Dogs!

This division was set up in 1988 by Patti Dynes, who, at the time, was Coordinator for Best Friends 4-H Club, and Margaret Russell, the Berrien County Youth Fair Dog Department Superintendent, for those children with “*different abilities.*”

You may recognize the term “*different abilities*” as “*disabled,*” or “*handicapped,*” or maybe even “*life challenged.*”

However you state it, the results remain the same. These are the children who were being omitted from exhibition in the canine world because as canine handlers, they could not perform to the standards of canine exhibition in agility or obedience.

Yet, when we put these same “*life challenged*” exhibitors into the canine therapy world at a Canine Good Citizen level, working one on one with a Team Instructor, these children thrived and blossomed! The reason...the exhibitor is accepted as being normal in this world. It is normal for him or her to have a life challenge. It is normal for him or her to perceive his or her realm differently from ours. It is normal for him or her to find another way of communicating with his or her own or volunteer team canine. It is normal for him or her to adapt to his or her environment in a fashion that may or may not be fully understood by the “*normal*” world.

What you have to keep in mind when working with life challenged exhibitors is it is a whole new culture. A culture of hard work, delight of discovery, and of experimentation to “think of another way to communicate with your canine.” *(Continued)*

Best Friends 4-H-*continued*

I had one wonderful obedience judge, Barbara Lukas Grob; literally perform as a dog when instructing an exhibitor as to how the exhibitor's dog should perform. Hey, don't knock it, it worked!

Best Friends 4-H Club and the Berrien County Youth Fair's Department 9 – Division 2 Department mission goals are one and the same. Those mission goals are:

- ❖ To provide an educational experience to exhibitors that otherwise might be omitted from competition and denied the experience and growth it provides.
- ❖ To provide exhibitors an opportunity to learn about canine training and handling in a safe, supportive environment by using the American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen Program as a goal.
- ❖ To focus on building positive relationships between the exhibitor and his or her own or volunteer canine through teamwork.
- ❖ To provide canine therapy and motivation with physical and mental stimulation.
- ❖ To have fun!

Over the eighteen years this canine department and 4-H club has existed, we have had a lot of success stories with our exhibitors. Canine therapy using the CGC Program as a basis works! You just need the leaders and volunteers to go the extra mile to ensure that it works....which, by the way, I have.

Linda M. Shannon-Chaillet