

Working Class Dogs

by Richard De Angelis, Director of Communications, DDAL

While today's modern canines have to adjust to the hectic schedules of their working human "parents," for many "latch key" dogs, spending their days home alone can become a boring and lonely routine. Likewise, many devoted "moms" and "dads" feel guilty over the quality time they lose with their furry family members while they toil to "bring home the kibble." As a solution to this problem, more and more people are bringing Fido or Fifi along with them to the office. In fact, one group is going to special lengths to make this option even more popular.

Every Dog Has His Day

Pet Sitters International (PSI), an educational organization for professional pet sitters, has designated Friday, June 25th, as the 1st Annual "Take Your Dog to Work Day." Besides giving employees the chance to bring their "best friends" to work, this event allows them to show how these wonderful companions can enrich the lives of many people besides the human guardians with whom they share a home. PSI president Patti Moran also wants to bring awareness to the problem of companion animal overpopulation and the ever-increasing number of dogs being taken in by humane societies, animal shelters and rescue clubs. According to Ms. Moran, "We hope that once co-workers see firsthand what great pets dogs make,

Left: Long-time animal advocate Representative Tom Lantos on the Capitol grounds with Gigi. Right: Shaka, a member of DDAL's Liz Clancy Lyons three-dog entourage.



many will be encouraged to give a good home to dogs in need of adoption."

Of course, the best way for dog lovers to do this is not by using this event as an opportunity for some "on the job training." Only dogs who are well-socialized and housebroken should be brought into the workplace. This will provide the best example to co-workers and raise the fewest possible objections from the boss. Fortunately for the employees of some progressive companies, this should not be a problem.

Equal Opportunity Employers

A number of businesses have already instituted year-round "pets at work" policies. Beyond allowing their workers to bring their dogs with them, some corporate executives, like Tyler Phillips, president of the Mountain View, California-based Netscape Communications, even advocate assistance for pet care, as does American Management Systems, located in Fairfax, Virginia, which pays for a pet sitter or kennel if an employee has to travel unexpectedly for the company. Partnership Group of Bell, Pennsylvania reimburses its employees for pet care costs whenever they have to travel on business. Explaining the advantages of working

in a "pet-friendly" environment to the *Wall Street Journal*, Netscape spokeswoman Patti Pearson said "a lot of people bring



their dogs in — it's cool. If you get stressed out, you can just walk around, and there's a warm, fuzzy dog to pet."

The perks of having regular, positive interaction with animals have been well-established. Repeated studies have shown that, compared to those who live animal-free lives, people who care for dogs and cats often enjoy lower blood pressure, a cheerier disposition, and a swifter recovery from illness or surgery. Furthermore, many employers report that letting dogs accompany their humans to work provides additional fringe benefits such as an increase in staff morale and worker productivity, greater camaraderie among employees, and even an increase in sales. But businesses, both big and small, are not the only institutions to discover the advantages of maintaining a "pet-friendly" workplace. The pitter patter of little paws are even being heard in the hallowed halls of our nation's government.

Congressional Canines

As head of the Congressional Friends of Animals caucus, Representative Tom Lantos (D-CA) has maintained an open-door policy that includes often overlooked constituents. His little white dog Gigi has been a part of his office staff ever since being adopted in 1988 from a shelter in his San Mateo district. When asked about this seasoned veteran's contribu-



tion to her husband's work, Annette Lantos said "Gigi makes the office more friendly and welcoming." Although Gigi would probably appreciate the sentiment if not the choice of words, Mrs. Lantos added, "She humanizes the office."

After Lisa Arfaa Webster was hired as the deputy chief of staff for freshman Representative Anthony Weiner (D-NY), she soon provided her own canine assistant. As reported in the congressional newspaper *Roll Call*, Katahdin Arfaa Webster, then a seven-month-old puppy, "comes to the Hill from the D.C. Humane Society and is considered the office consultant on animal rights."

Congressman Weiner could not be more happy with his decision to "hire" the precocious German Shepherd. "Now Katahdin has two loving families: one at home, and one at our Congressional office. He comes to the office almost every day of the



New York Representative Anthony Weiner (wearing vest) and staff, including canine assistant Katahdin Arfaa Webster.

week — both when we're in and out of session. Members of the staff take turns playing with him, taking him for walks, and teaching him how to fetch, sit and stay still when we're in office meetings (his favorite times of the day). He helps to greet office visitors, explores the Capitol with me, and keeps the staff upbeat and in good spirits. His endless affection, coupled with a quick game of fetch in the hall, does wonders with the morale of the office."

Leaguers of the Pack

As you might expect, the Doris Day Animal League shares Congressman Weiner's appreciation for the contributions of its canine co-workers. Each day, Liz Clancy Lyons, our Director of Special Projects, arrives with one or more members of her own three-dog entourage. Ballou, a twelve-year-old border collie mix, is not only our senior-most staffer, but because Liz adopted him while living in London, he also serves as a distinguished British

ambassador. "Ballou loves coming to work," explains Liz, "and everyone loves having him at the office. The lunch time walks we take are necessary for him as an older dog, and are a nice break for me during a stressful work day."

Often accompanying her are two rottweillers; the older, quietly reserved Shaka and the youthfully exuberant Diesel. They too require special attention according to Liz. "Anyone thinking about bringing a dog to work should consider how you will fit your dog's exercise requirements into your schedule. Also, give some thought to what else your dog might need, including a bed or blanket, a water dish and chew toys." Despite these minor adjustments, she is confident that, "If done right, bringing your dog to work can be a positive experience for everyone." 🐾

This is the first of two articles profiling animals in the workplace.

Photo: Rebecca Roth, Roll Call