

**LUNA AND HAL**

# Good dogs!

Certified therapy canines visit sick, elderly in county as part of PAWS

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**L**una and Hal know how to help people.

Luna is a former detection canine and Hal is a retired racing greyhound. Today, they're therapy dogs visiting the sick and elderly throughout Lee County as part of the Pet-Assisted Volunteer Visitation Services (PAWS) therapy canine program.

Hal's owner, Camille Barkley, said many people confuse therapy dogs with service dogs.

"A lot of people think these dogs do something special or have some kind of special talent or power," Barkley said. "But really, their great power is that they are just dogs that are well behaved, calm and create a calming presence for other people."

Barkley and Lucy LaMar, Luna's owner, both work in the department of communications and marketing at Auburn University. They spoke Monday at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute's weekly meeting about therapy dogs and their work.

Barkley said Luna and Hal visit places where people who had pets in the past might not be able to have them anymore, from hospitals to nursing homes. Some therapy dogs even visit children at libraries who are having reading difficulties.

"Dogs are not judgmental," Barkley



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**Camille Barkley and her dog Hal, a retired racing greyhound, and Lucy LaMar and Luna, a former explosives detection dog, are volunteers with Pet-Assisted Volunteer Visitation Services (PAWS), a therapy canine program.**

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**Camille Barkley,**

owner of Hal, a certified therapy dog

said. "So a lot of people do pet therapy at the local library and the children come in, read to the dog and it improves their reading skills."

LaMar said studies show dog owners have longer life expectancies and, typically, a lower chance of heart attack. She said petting a dog releases serotonin and dopamine, which are hormones that improve one's mood.

LaMar quoted Florence Nightingale, who said in 1859, "A small pet is often

an excellent companion for the sick, for the long, chronic cases especially."

Luna, who was part of Auburn University's canine detection program, was trained in a research study to detect explosives in cars, buildings and open areas.

"When they have dogs at the end of the program, they adopt them out," LaMar said of the program. "I adopted her, and as a member of Auburn United Methodist Church, who has their PAWS program, I knew I wanted to do that."

LaMar and Barkley tested their dogs in May of 2012 through the church's certification testing process.

"It is basically just to find out that the dog behaves fairly well and will work well with people and obey basic commands," LaMar said. "After she got certified, we started visiting Arbor Springs and the nursing floor unit at



# Therapy

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(East Alabama Medical Center)."

Hal and Luna have different strengths and weaknesses, according to their owners. LaMar said Luna gets excited by exercise balls in physical therapy rooms and Barkley said Hal loves the stuffed animals often found at the bedsides of sick patients.

Hal, a retired racing greyhound from the Birmingham Race Course, must be leashed or fenced at all times, as greyhounds can reach speeds of up to 45 miles an hour.

"Hal's adoption group is called Second Chance Greyhounds," Barkley said. "It's kind of an interesting volunteer group. They get most of the dogs from the Birmingham kennel."

Barkley said the adoption organization helps transition greyhounds from being racers

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**Lucy LaMar,**  
owner of therapy dog Luna

to pets. She said dogs that live at the track most of their lives don't understand typical things in a house, from sliding glass doors to the general way of life.

Both Luna and Hal worked in prison programs. Hal's program allowed inmates to prepare retired greyhounds for a life at home and allowed the inmates to



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Lucy LaMar and her therapy dog Luna and Camille Barkley and her therapy dog Hal visit a patient.

work on a craft like dog training they could use after they are released.

LaMar said the experiences their dogs have gone through have prepared Luna and Hal to be ideal therapy dogs. She said she and Barkley have loved the therapy program during the last

year.

"It's nice to hear what people say," LaMar said. "You take these dogs into patients' rooms and they tell you things like, 'You made my day.' How can that not affect you? It's such a feeling of shared joy to bring her joy to people."

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