

Assistance Dogs Need Homes for Good

Not all owners can keep their retired assistance dogs for life. You can help.

Beth Finke

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Logerfo credits Linders' lifelong exemplary veterinary care and his active life as a guide for his good physical shape, even at age 11. "He's just the perfect dog. Older, but perfect."

If you're interested in adopting a retired service dog, consider these points: Assistance dogs are used to constant companionship. A situation in which someone is home most of the day would be best for the retiree. Adopters should be prepared for the financial and emotional costs of taking on a dog with probable medical issues. Training and placement programs usually provide a medical history for the dog. If they don't, ask for it. Many retirees suffer from joint pain. The fewer stairs in your home, the better; or a large first floor in which you can contain the dog will work, too. You should be willing to drive to pick up a dog. Most programs won't ship dogs by air.

In general, the more willing you are to accept a senior dog that may have or develop a medical condition, the sooner a training program might place a dog with you.

If you do adopt a retired service dog, remember he'll have been used to working. You can help maintain his mental acuity by giving simple tasks like fetching or stopping at curbs, advises Joan Froling, chairperson of the International Association of Assistance Dog Partners, a nonprofit organization linking assistance dog teams and training programs. "The biggest mistake when retiring an assistance dog is to expect the dog to be content being a total couch potato."

People interested in adopting a retired dog should contact individual training centers, fill out an application, then check back with the organization regularly. Froling, who also volunteers as client services coordinator for Sterling Service Dogs in Sterling Heights, Mich., suggests applicants willing to wait longer than a year should state that clearly from the start. "I am glad to call them a year or two later if a nice dog comes up for retirement they just need to stay in touch," she says. "I'll also keep that person in mind if I hear of a promising dog becoming available from another program, or if I hear from a friend seeking a retirement home for their assistance dog."

Logerfo sees the adoption of a retired service dog as a golden opportunity. "You get to give these dogs a gift for their years of outstanding service helping our fellow human beings," she says. "It's the least we can do in return supply them with a wonderful home, love, and the best care possible."

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