

Service Dogs to Receive Free Eye Exams

Veterinary ophthalmologists hope to preserve the sight and health of “working dogs.”

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Paul Gerding, Jr., DVM, of Eye Care for Animals in St. Charles, Ill., examines Hawk during last year's ACVO National Service Dog Eye Exam Day. More than 150 board-certified veterinary ophthalmologists are scheduled to provide free eye exams to service dogs as part of the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists' 2nd National Service Dog Exam Day, which runs May 3 through 9.

The goal is to preserve the sight and health of “working dogs,” including guide dogs, handicapped assistance dogs, detection dogs, and search-and-rescue dogs.

“Many of ACVO's ophthalmologists generously provide similar services to their service dog clients throughout the year,” said Stacey Daniel, executive director of the organization. “Our hope is that by checking these animals' vision on the national day of service, we will be able to help a large number of dogs better assist their human friends.”

To qualify, dogs must be active working dogs who were certified by a formal training program or organization or currently enrolled in a formal training program.

Owners/agents for the dog(s) can register the animal via an online registration form. Once registered, the owner/agent can locate a participating ophthalmologist in their area to schedule an appointment.

More than 180 ACVO diplomates volunteered in last year's event by screening the ocular health of about 1,500 service dogs. The combined effort equated to about \$500,000 worth of donated services.

National Service Dog Eye Exam Day has gained the support from the following nonprofit organizations: American Animal Hospital Association, American Veterinary Medical Association, state veterinary medical associations in the U.S. and Canada, American Society of Veterinary Medical Association Executives, Veterinary Hospital Managers Association, Veterinary Ophthalmic Technicians Society, Guiding Eyes for the Blind, American Association of Detection Dogs, North American Police Dog Association, National Narcotic Detection Dog Association, Patriot Paws Service Dogs, Paws with a Cause, Department of Homeland Security, and Service Dogs of America. Additional organizational support is pending.

Sponsors include Hill's Pet Nutrition, OptiGen, and Kong Veterinary Products.