

NASA Engineer Helps Train Guide Dog

Golden Retriever guide dog goes to work every day at NASA Research Center.

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One of NASA's newest workers is already a top dog -- literally.

A Golden Retriever puppy named Aries goes to work every day at NASA's Langley Research Center in Hampton, Va., as part of the Leader Dogs for the Blind program. Her mentor is structural engineer Evan J. Horowitz.

As a child, Horowitz says, he had seen a movie character raising a guide dog and it made a huge impression: "I've always wanted to give like most people do. Lots of people give money to charity, but I wanted to do something a little more, something more hands on, more from my heart," he said.

Horowitz was previously in charge of structural engineering for a research aircraft known as ARIES, short for Airborne Research Integrated Experiments System. And that's how he came up with a name for his canine student, he said.

Aries is Horowitz's third Leader puppy, but his first since coming to NASA Langley two years ago. He put his name on a waiting list for a female Golden Retriever at the Rochester, Michigan-based Leader Dogs for the Blind 18 months ago. During that time he made sure that he would be allowed to take a puppy to work at a government aerospace research center.

"It took a little bit of diligence to get through to all the right people, especially trying to figure out who all the right people were. I contacted the office of safety, security, questioned legal and of course the management and my co-workers to make sure they were OK with a puppy in the office," Horowitz said.

The goal of Aries' training at NASA is not to turn her into a rocket scientist, but into a well-socialized dog with knowledge of basic commands. Horowitz said he's supposed to walk around work with the puppy as if she wasn't there, but that's not easy to do considering the attention she attracts.

"She's adorable. She's a lot of love. She's a lot of fun. She gets me to meet a lot of people ... because she's just a magnet for socializing," Horowitz said.

After about 12 months Aries will return to Michigan to complete her training and then go on to her permanent home. Horowitz said he's already prepared himself for that.

"I have her as a little pup and I'm going to raise her to be a young adult. At that point I will have to give her away to go on to a life of her own; a new bigger, better, purposeful life," he said.

For more information on Leader Dogs for the Blind, visit <http://leaderdog.org>.