

Assistance Dogs Have Their Day

A new holiday will honor and raise awareness for assistance dogs and those who train them.

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The first-ever National Assistance Dog Day will be celebrated Aug. 9, 2007, and will continue to occur on the second Thursday in August from now on. Marcie Davis, a paraplegic and president of Working Like Dogs, recently registered the holiday.

"I'm so excited, it's way overdue," she says. "This year it's really about announcing it, and next year we're going to plan nationwide events."

For the last 35 years, Marcie Davis has been confined to a wheelchair due to a spinal cord infection she contracted when she was 6 years old. Fifteen years ago she received her first assistance dog, Ramona, a Labrador Retriever and Golden Retriever mix. She says Ramona changed her life.

"She gave me a sense of independence and confidence that I never felt before," Davis says. She used to avoid getting behind the wheel, even though she had a specially-designed vehicle that allowed her to drive using hand controls, but a fear of falling or dropping her keys kept her from driving. With the help of her canine companion, she says she no longer worries about such things because assistance dogs are trained to help their owners under those types of circumstances, among many others.

Now she works to raise awareness through Working Like Dogs, an organization that honors and promotes awareness for assistance dogs.

"It's an organization that helps support and promote working class dogs throughout the country," she says of her organization, and added that she hopes an annual holiday will build on her efforts.

"I'm hoping that it'll raise awareness of the importance of assistance dogs to people with disabilities," she says, "And for the nonprofits that work so hard to train these dogs."

For more information about National Assistance Dog Day or Working Like Dogs, visit www.workinglikedogs.com.