

## Doggie Massage

**Treat your dog to a relaxing massage that will improve her health, too.**

*Beth Finke*

Judson wasn't sure about flying to New Orleans. "He just couldn't settle down," says Shelley Rhodes, surprised at her 6-year-old guide dog's behavior on the plane that day. "He kept whining and panting and fidgeting."

Massage techniques she'd learned while training with Judson at Guide Dogs for the Blind in San Rafael, Calif., helped calm the Golden Retriever. "I started to do ear touches," says Rhodes, an assistive technology instructor from Corry, Pa. "It worked. After a few touches, he settled down and was able to lie in front of my seat."

A guide dog's work is based on the close bond he has with the person holding the harness. But flying on planes, judging traffic, and needling through construction areas can all stress that bond. Recognizing how human touch can help alleviate tension and reaffirm the bond, guide dog schools offer their students classes in canine massage.

"Massage is really a lovely way to interact with the dogs, reinforce the bond," says Lea Johnson, an instructor at Seeing Eye, which breeds and trains guide dogs in Morristown, N.J.

### Why Massage?

The same techniques used with guide dogs can help any dog owner enjoy a closer relationship with his or her dog. Massage brings dogs and their owners other benefits as well, including:

Increased circulation, which can improve a dog's health.

Earlier awareness of lumps and unusual growths.

Deeper attachment between dog and owner, allowing them to bond further.

Extended praise for the dog.

Increased acceptance of handling by the dog.

Stress and heart rate reduction for the owner.

Reduced stress by lowering the dog's heart rate and providing a quiet, relaxing experience. Liz Hare, a canine geneticist in Garrison, N.Y., can vouch for that last one. "For me, it's like meditation. It's a way to be really calm and mindful," she says, giving 12-year-old retired guide dog Ben a pat as he sleeps at her feet. "I do it in the evening when I want to relax and clear my mind."