

## *Claudia Haworth and Bridger*



In 2013 my husband worked for the Morris Animal Foundation. MAF had launched a longitudinal study on the health of golden retrievers. The organization needed access to a golden retriever for marketing and public relations. We decided as a family to get a golden retriever from a breeder with a reputation for producing pups with a great temperament. We also wanted to train the dog to be a therapy dog as we were keenly interested in

the human and animal bond and all the good that comes from relationships with our pets. That dog is Bridger.

A friend, Marla Yetka, was already working with DPP with her golden retriever, Snickers. We trained together to get Bridger and I ready for our certification. We loved the work and have had many positive experiences in schools, memory care facilities, assisted living institutions and hospitals. Shortly after being certified, we moved to Phoenix where Bridger and I were a therapy team for two local hospitals. Even though we were no longer based in Denver, Bridger continued to wear his DPP vest to every visit. When he wore it, he knew he was “working”. No one questioned the geography of the vest. They loved having a visit from Bridger.



One of the most memorable visits occurred on our last shift at Phoenix Children’s Hospital. A young patient had been a victim of a dog attack and her family was requesting a visit from a therapy dog. The patient was about 4 years old and a girl. She was terrified to have Bridger visit but her grandfather and dad thought it important that she have a positive encounter with a dog so that she wouldn’t fear them for the remainder of her life. My supervisor knew Bridger was the right dog for this patient visit. We waited outside of her hospital room across the hall until she was ready for Bridger to come into her room. Inching towards her, he rested his chin on the edge of her bed. From the far side of the bed, she stretched out her leg and patted

## *DPP Team of the Month (April 2023)*



his head with her toes. That was enough for her and Bridger seemed happy to have been a part of her healing journey. Later, when walking past her room, we overheard her describing the visit with Bridger - "His face was so soft I just wanted to squish him in my hands!". I told Bridger he was lucky to get out with a toe tap.

Bridger has a unique ability shared by most pets. He has the ability to read a room, sense who is hurting or anxious and go to that person. He's calm, caring and very sensitive. He has his goofy moments - zoomies, water bottles and lovie's always get him excited. But, when there is a need for someone to be comforted, he delivers.

Thanks for welcoming us to the DPP family. We are right where we need to be.

