

## *Svetlana Kokareva and Mishka*



Mishka and I are so honored to be chosen as the Team of the Month! We have been a Denver Pet Partners team since 2022 and are absolutely grateful to have the opportunity to volunteer in the community.

Mishka is a six-year-old Golden Retriever who only weighs 50 pounds, making her the most perfect cuddle buddy. She is adventurous, loving, social, and radiates sunshine to anyone nearby. In some ways she is just another average girl who loves taking long walks at the park, getting pup cups at Starbucks, and exploring at T.J.Maxx!

The dream of one day becoming a Pet Partners team started back in 2016, while I was a Mental Health Counseling graduate student interning at a child

advocacy center in Florida. During one of our weekly staff meetings, it was shared that we would be having furry friends visit the center to bring lightness for the kiddos and their families. It was impossible to contain the excitement on the first day that a Pet Partners team (a happy go lucky chocolate lab) sat in the waiting room greeting all the families and staff. As months have passed, I saw first-hand the beautiful impact that the Pet Partners team had provided to the families during some of their hardest moments. That therapy team had invited so much gentleness, courage, and endless smiles to anyone walking by. No matter what was being shared in the therapy rooms, the moment the families saw the wagging tail or the excited tongue hanging out, their spirits were lifted and hugs were exchanged with the therapy dog who visited. It was through that experience that the dream sparked, way before I had even set my eyes on Mishka.



In 2018, I had spotted Mishka's little smile and knew that she was absolutely perfect. Throughout Mishka's puppy years, she was always overly friendly. She absolutely loved being around humans and would make it her personal mission to get everyone around her to play and pet her. When she would see her favorite people, she would (and still does to this day) squeal with excitement! She also had her mischievous moments too, filled with

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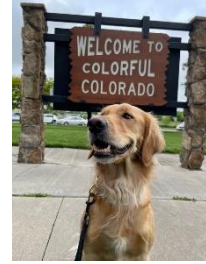


lots of chewed up items and hiding palm tree seeds in her mouth during walks (hoping to sneak some home).



In 2021 after moving to Colorado and noticing that her puppy energy was decreasing, I took her training to the next level. I already knew that Mishka loved people of all ages and was well acclimated to various settings. The next step was to embark on the joys of obedience training! Over a year of classes and practice, I finally chose to go to the handler workshop and then sign up for the evaluation. We had passed and to my surprise had received the rating of complex!! Pup cups

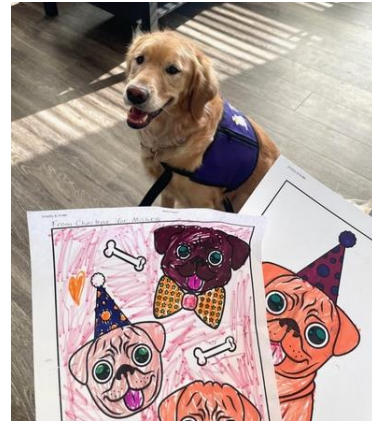
at Starbucks and Chick-fil-A fries were immediately on the horizon for Mishka!



I had always wanted to volunteer with Mishka in a setting with children, so when I saw that an elementary school was requesting a volunteer team, I immediately signed up. For the last two school years, Mishka and I have stayed consistent with volunteering at the school, visiting every other week or monthly.

Mishka would always walk into the school entrance with her big smile and tail wagging. We would go into the office to greet the administration staff, meet up with the school counselor, and then start our mornings going to various classrooms and engaging in small groups. Mishka absolutely loved it when the whole class would sit in a circle on the floor where she would walk right up to every single student to greet them (even those who were once scared of furry friends ended up warming up to Mishka and giving hugs).

The students also greatly enjoyed seeing all of Mishka's tricks, with the fan favorite of catching a treat from the top of her nose. Walking down the school hallways always made my heart flutter as you could hear students' excitement radiating from the classrooms when they saw that Mishka was there that morning.





Mishka was so loved by the students and teachers. There was even a day when a 4th grade class threw Mishka a birthday party, complete with a doggy birthday banner and homemade cards! My heart was melting as Mishka had a huge smile on her face while taking pictures with every single student in the class. Mishka's smile and spirit was so infectious, that students who were having a hard morning would immediately perk up after a few pets with Mishka. In her own way, Mishka was also teaching kiddos how to work on patience, ask for permission, and respect personal space (over 8 little hands all at once on Mishka can be overwhelming). Students would share their own stories of family pets and



tell Mishka all about the various activities they did over the weekends. The power of the human-animal bond is just a wonder to see in action! Mishka absolutely loved visiting the school, to the point that once we exited the building, she would do her golden retriever thing and put on the brakes before finally accepting that it was time to go home. If it was up to her, she would be happy to stay there the whole school day, wander around the hallways, and join the kiddos with various learning activities!

I treasure all of the moments Mishka had at the school (and many more to come) and I am so thankful for Denver Pet Partners for providing this opportunity to share Mishka with the community!



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