

Not just puppy love

Local teen raises leader dogs for the blind

By **Holly Bowne**
SPECIAL WRITER

Not many of us would decide on a career and start saving money to make it a reality at the age of 5. Nor, would many of us ask to be placed on the waiting list to train future leader dogs for the blind at the age of 10.

But 14-year-old Molly Buis did those very things. Currently rais-

ing her third dog, Sophie, Buis has been training leader dogs for three years in coordination with Leader Dogs for the Blind in Rochester.

Knowing from a young age that she wanted to become a veterinarian when she grew up, Buis learned about the leader dog program while visiting a booth at

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Photo by **HOLLY BOWNE**

Molly Buis, 14, sits with her dog-in-training, Sophie. Buis raises pups that are used as leader dogs for the blind.

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Michigan State University's College of Veterinary Medicine Vet-a-Visit program. She's attended the annual Vet-A-Visit event every year since she was in first grade.

Before receiving her first dog, Mudge, Buis was given a thick puppy-raising manual and a video.

"It's important to watch the video and read the manual," Buis says. "Even if you've had a dog before, some things are different from the way you'd train a family pet."

Mudge was donated at eight-and-a-half-weeks old — older than the ideal seven weeks the school prefers — and needed to be placed in a volunteer raiser's home as quickly as possible to start the training process. Buis was ready and available.

During training, Buis discovered Mudge had allergies which unfortunately made her unsuitable for the program. As a result, ownership was signed over to Buis and she's currently attempting to certify Mudge as a therapy dog with Therapy Dogs International, based in Flanders, N.J. She hopes to bring the dog to visit children being treated at Mott Children's Hospital.

"Mudge just loves kids!" Buis says.

Buis' second dog, Martha, suc-

cessfully completed the one-year training and has been assigned to a new blind owner. Once Martha was turned over to the school, Buis had to completely remove herself from Martha's life.

"They don't want you to visit the dog after you're done training because there is a significant adjustment period in which the dog has to go from spending all its time with the raiser to spending no time with the raiser, and eventually developing a bond with its new owner."

Buis admits it's a little sad to give the dogs back, but she looks at the greater good of what she is doing to help a blind person live more independently.

Buis' newest trainee is Sophie, a three-month-old golden retriever. In addition to training the dogs at home, Buis takes them to obedience classes at the school twice a month, and participates in small group sessions where leaders organize trips to places like Detroit Metro Airport.

"Sometimes the first place the new owner will take the dog after leaving the school, is to the airport to fly home. So we make sure the dogs are comfortable and don't freak out going through security checks, metal detectors, and all the different areas of the airport."

Buis' mother is extremely proud of her daughter's accom-



Molly Buis sits with Mudge and Sophie. Because Mudge has allergy problems, the dog was not used as a leader dog but is a very good friend.

plishment.

"The first year, there were some other kids in the program, but the families were doing the actual raising," Buis' mom says. "But Molly signed the contract herself, and she has done the raising. She really had to prove herself in the beginning."

A South Lyon High School freshman this year, Buis was concerned about having less time to train the dogs now that she is starting high school.

"It's a lot of work, 24 hours a day," Buis says. "With Mudge, I slept on the couch the first 10 days I had her because she cried and had to go out in the middle of the night."

So for Sophie, both Buis and her 16-year-old sister, Bonnie, signed the contract to train Sophie together.

"I take her out in public part of the time, feed and help groom her. But at night, I'm just the assistant!" Bonnie said with a laugh.