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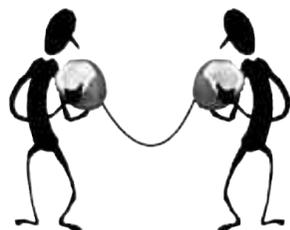
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Articles

Zoe Brings Therapy and Smiles.....3
Send Keys Native Mike Theiss to Antarctica.....4
Business Spotlight: Key Largo Conch House.....5
Pelicans6
Artist of the Month, Guy Snell.....7
Stoking the Fire Within.....9
Bartender of the Month, Lisa Lardinois.....11
Getting from Here to There- the map page.....12
Rockin' the Dock at Sharkey's.....15
Conch Characters.....17
Florida Scorpions.....18
School Supply Round Up.....20
Tattoo Facts.....20
Business in the Keys.....21
Darwin Awards.....21
Coco 'Nut' Funnies.....23

Zoe Brings Therapy and Smiles



By Rachel R. Peine

All heads turn as Zoe the Golden Retriever (along with her human, Chuck Nations), approaches the deck at Plantation Key Convalescent Center. She welcomes the hands that reach out to pet her, and she sits down to join the conversation. "She's so beautiful and sweet", says Beverly Morris. Jack Scott from Maintenance grins, "She licked my hand when I petted her! She's so friendly!"

Zoe wears bright red "saddlebags" that say "Therapy Dog - Zoe", and a red bandana with the logo of Therapy Dogs International. I met her when Chuck and she were visiting one of his DCF clients at PKCC. As they walked through the halls, Zoe brightened everyone's day. Chuck's territory runs from Marathon to the Everglades, and Zoe often accompanies him to home visits if the client wants her to come along. She's even been to see clients at Mariner's Hospital. Her big brown eyes and wagging tail create warmth and comfort for people who are eager for companionship.

It takes a special dog to become certified as a

Therapy Dog. When Chuck had Zoe evaluated for Therapy Dog training, they arrived late to find a group of 30 - 40 dogs already in line for testing. Chuck watched as most of them failed the tests: being able to "sit" and "stay" while their person walked about 20 feet away and then called them to come. To enter the program, the applicant had to follow these commands three times. Zoe responded perfectly, and everyone applauded.

Zoe will have more time for volunteer work when Chuck retires, and she has many opportunities. People in physical therapy are more motivated to walk when a therapy dog is walking beside them. Therapy dogs even help children learn to read. A child who reads out loud to an attentive, tail-wagging audience knows that there will be no criticism for hesitation or mispronounced words.

Zoe would be wonderful in any type of therapy. She brings her caring spirit to everyone she helps. I know I'm still smiling just thinking about her.

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