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Today's Paper

Thursday, June 4, 2009

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## Dog's eye view

### Because of important work they do, it is essential service dogs have their eyes examined every year

May 05, 2009

**MALLORY BRESOLIN**  
SPECIAL TO THE MERCURY

Bob had his eyes examined yesterday. Everything was fine, but he had to take the rest of the day off work.

The four-year-old German shepherd, was taken to the University of Guelph's Ontario Veterinary Clinic for a free eye exam. The American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists offers the service annually for service dogs.

"Just because I didn't see anything this year, doesn't mean I won't see something next year," said Nick Whelan, associate professor of veterinary ophthalmology at the University of Guelph.

Monitoring the eyesight of service dogs is crucial because of the work they do. The eyesight of five service dogs was checked.

"Animals are such an important part of people's lives," said Whelan, which is why the OVC decided to take part in the event.

Whelan needed to dilate Bob's eyes with drops before he could do the exam. For a thorough examination, "I look at the front part, then the middle, then the back of the eye," said Whelan. He says each breed has different issues when it comes to eyesight.

Labrador retrievers, who are most often used as seeing-eye dogs, "have a specific type of cataract," said Whelan. He likened the cataract to putting a dab of Vaseline in the middle of a dog's eye. German shepherds like Bob, however, are more likely to have pigment problems in their eyes.

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The dogs are instructed not to work for the remainder of the day, which means the owners may have to make other arrangements to get home.

Bob's eyes are "going to stay dilated for the rest of the day," said Whelan, who didn't see any problems with Bob during the exam.

Before leaving the clinic, Bob's owner, Joanne Sephton put a mask on Bob to keep the light from straining his dilated eyes.

Sephton said the assistance dog wasn't nervous for the exam. "He loves it here."

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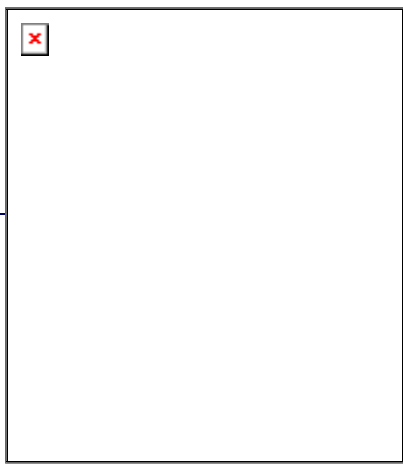
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