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## Rocklin participates in national program to protect service dogs' vision

By Lauren Weber, The Placer Herald



Phillip Wood, Gold Country News Service

As part of the National Service Dog Eye Exam week, Dottie Michelmore of Carmichael brought her 2-year-old schnauzer, Bear, in for a free eye exam with Dr. Lana Linton at Rocklin's Animal Eye Center. Bear is training to be a trailing search and rescue dog, following human scents.

Tuesday morning, Linton's first appointment was with Bear, a 2-year-old standard schnauzer in the midst of training to become a search and rescue dog, and Big B, a 12-year-old poodle who is a therapy dog.

Dottie Michelmore of Carmichael, the owner of Bear and Big B, brought her dogs in as a precaution – neither had any previous eyesight problems.

Michelmore said she heard about the free exams through the Sacramento County Sheriff Search and Rescue organization she belongs to with Bear.

Bear is about half way through his training to be a trailing dog, in which he will track scent articles such as a piece of clothing with a human scent. Michelmore said it takes about two to three years to complete training with pretend searches conducted three times a week.

"The dogs have the instinct to track, it's just how strong of an instinct," Michelmore said. "He loves the tracking part of it."

Big B's calmness lends itself to work as a therapy dog. The black poodle visits people at Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Sacramento where he shows off his tricks and visits with patients.

Tuesday's appointment began with eye drops for the dogs, making their pupils dilate. After about 20 minutes, Bear and Big B were ready for their annual checkup.

With each eye exam, Linton examines the eye, eyelids and pupils, checks the animal's depth perception and uses an indirect optoscope to look at the retina. Some dogs are more susceptible to genetic eye disorders and diseases such as cataracts, Linton said, so she also checks for that.

Linton said she recommends annual exams, especially with retinal diseases that show up at an older age.

Linton found a small, benign eyelid tumor in Bear that was "no big deal" and an age-related cataract in Big B, but neither were anything to bring up concerns.

For service dogs, eyesight is key.

They rely on sight to direct their sight-impaired owner or track down a runaway criminal.

Because a strong sense of sight is essential for service dogs, a weeklong, national partnership with local veterinary ophthalmologists was put into place.

Throughout the week, guide dogs, detection dogs and search and rescue dogs have been in and out of the Animal Eye Center in Rocklin for their annual eye exams, at no cost.

It's all part of the national campaign called ACVO/Merial National Service Dog Eye Exam Day. Certified dogs can visit the center and receive a quick and painless eye exam.

Dr. Lana Linton of Animal Eye Center on Pacific Street, said this is the second year the Rocklin clinic has participated in the free exams.

"It's our way of making sure these service dogs with their eyes so important, that they're doing well," Linton said.

Animal Eye Center is a member of the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists and is one of the many service centers providing animal eye care for free through Saturday.

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C

91

88

com

shar

Em  
91

"Your retina looks sharp," Linton said of Bear's eyes.

Linton also tested eye tracking in bright light, dim light and darkness by dropping a cotton ball to see if the dog followed the drop.

The exam concluded with tricks and treats for the canines and a promise to be back for next year's check up.

Although this year only attracted about a dozen free service dog appointments to Rocklin, Linton said approximately 1,500 free eye exams were administered nationwide during last year's campaign.

Linton is one of more than 150 board-certified veterinary ophthalmologists across the U.S. that provide free eye exams to service dogs during the week.

"Our hope is that by checking these animals' vision on the national day of service, we will be able to help a large number of dogs better assist their human friends," said Stacey Daniel, executive director of the organization, in a news release.

For more information, go to [acvoeyeexam.org](http://acvoeyeexam.org).

Contact Lauren Weber at .

### Keywords

[service dogs](#), [Animal Eye Center](#), [eye exam](#), [Dr. Lana Linton](#), [therapy dogs](#), [free eye exams](#), [national week](#)

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