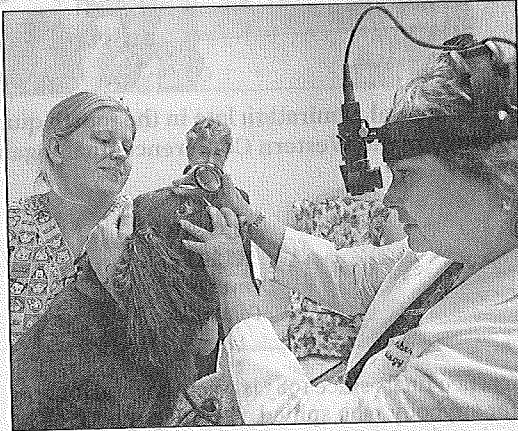


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Colleen Kirkpatrick holds Tali as Nancy Bromberg examines the service dog's eyes in Fairfax, Va. Kenneth K. Lam, *The Baltimore Sun*

Free eye checkups help service dogs

By *The Baltimore Sun*

Tali's pupils were dilated, so ophthalmologist Nancy Bromberg dimmed the lights and began peering deep into his big brown eyes. She declared them healthy a few minutes later, except for a little allergy-related irritation.

That's good news for Tali, a 6-year-old field spaniel who lives in Columbia, Md., with Meg Meyers and needs good eyesight to continue working. The therapy dog regularly makes the rounds as a goodwill ambassador in a residential high school for girls. He has done similar work in an assisted-living facility.

As part of an annual event, the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists arranged for about 170 veterinary ophthalmologists nationwide to offer free exams for up to 2,000 dogs. The animals aid in search and rescue, offer assistance to disabled people or simply give time and attention to those in need of it.

There are an estimated 40,000 to 60,000 American service dogs.