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Service dogs qualify for free eye exams in the U.S. and Canada

Posted: Tuesday, January 5, 2010, 7:20 p.m., EST

The American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists, or ACVO, plans to launch the 3rd Annual ACVO/Merial National Service Dog Eye Exam event. Thousands of guide dogs, assistance dogs, detection dogs and search and rescue dogs receive free sight-saving eye exams in the United States and Canada during the month of May.



Dr. Robert Peiffer of the Center for Animal Referral and Emergency Services examines "Eagle" during the 2009 event.

As part of the event, more than 150 board certified veterinary ophthalmologists participate in providing free eye exams to service dogs. The goal is to make sure that these animals are being represented so they are able to keep working, according to event organizers.

Dr. Robert Peiffer says these ocular exams offer an opportunity to identify any health issues before major complications develop. "Early detection and treatment are keys to fast recovery," he adds.

During an exam, doctors look for any retinal disease or early cataracts. They also check for things that will limit a dog's vision down the road, such as an ingrown hair or anything that can result in a scratch of the cornea.

Registration for the event begins April 1. To qualify, dogs must be active "working dogs" that were certified by a formal training program or organization, or are enrolled in a formal training program.

[Click here](#) for more information and an online registration form. Registration ends May 16. [<HOME>](#)

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Service dogs qualify for free eye exams in the U.S. and Canada

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Industry Professional Site: Comments from non-industry professionals will be removed.

Reader Comments

The American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists appreciates your interest in the ACVO/Merial Service Dog Eye Exam Program. It is correct that the complimentary eye exam is provided to Service Dogs that have been formally trained (and have the corresponding paperwork) or have been certified by a recognized Service Dog program. The purpose for the criteria is twofold: 1. ACVO is developing a database that can be used in the future to identify potential eye problems associated with the jobs that certain groups of Service Dogs perform. To make the data useful we have to carefully set the criteria for participants. 2. Over the past several years we have had some individuals claim their dog was a Service Dog just to take advantage of the eye exam. ACVO diplomates generously donate their time and resources to provide eye exams for Service Dogs. These resources are limited and if nonqualified dogs were to fill the limited time slots allotted then a qualified dog may be excluded.

Breaking News

- Hill's Honors Dr. John Harvey with 2010 Mark L. Morris Sr. Lifetime Achievement Award
- Veterinary Outreach in Haiti Includes Mobile Animal Clinic
- PetWise Veterinary Website Design and Hosting Service Unveiled
- UPDATED: Merrick Recalls One Lot of Beef Filet Dog Treats
- VetCentric Expands Services in Partnerships With Hill's and ImProMed

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The ACVO apologizes for any inconvenience our criteria for inclusion in the Service Dog Eye Exam Program may impose, we are doing the best we can for the community. We thank you all for your interest.

Stacee Daniel, ACVO Director, Boise, ID
Posted: 1/19/2010 9:24:24 AM

I think it is wonderful that these veterinarians are willing to donate their time and effort to such a worthy project.

AT the same time though I am disappointed by the limitation of only dogs trained by an organization. Many disabled out here use service animals that we have trained ourselves. We do this for a multitude of reasons from the not qualifying under a set program due to disabilities do not fall under guidelines, multiple health problems and even finances can go into the decision to train the dog yourself.

In my case I am not insulin dependent with my diabetes (which I can thank my current service animal for helping me avoid that) I also have problems with mobility balance and social anxiety. The extra bonding with Abbey has made it possible for her to be a perfect service animal for me. I doubt such a match could have happened with a program trained dog.

At the same time it looks like I will have to retire Abbey soon as she is developing cataracts and I am on a fixed income so unable to get any veterinary optometrist services.

Deborah, Knoxville, TN
Posted: 1/16/2010 10:09:52 AM

I like this article. It is sad however that only "program dogs" qualify. Many disabled individuals train their own as well. Many others hire trainers on an individual basis to train their dogs also. It would be nice to include them as well.

An easy way to do this would be to offer this to members of the International Association of Assistance Dog Partners as well.

Many other organizations partner with them to provide services for Service Dogs.

Tonja, Omaha, NE
Posted: 1/8/2010 8:58:10 PM

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