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Pet Tales: Dogs who serve get free eye exams

Linda Wilson Fuoco, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on May 16, 2017
Published in Cats & Dogs News (/homeandleisure/pets/catsanddogs/)

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PITTSBURGH -- The eyes of Lola and Yahtzee are more precious than the eyes of most dogs; these Labrador retrievers are the eyes and lifelines of their blind partners.

Lola, a 2-year-old yellow female, and Yahtzee, a 10-year-old black male, are among the 100-150 "working" dogs getting free screening eye exams this month at Pittsburgh Veterinary Specialty & Emergency Center.

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Recently, Lola came to the Ohio Township facility with partner Mike Gravitt. His wife, Johna Gravitt, came with Yahtzee. Both dogs were trained by Guiding Eyes for the Blind in Yorktown Heights, N.Y.

The couple and their dogs live in a Dormont apartment building.

"At home when their harnesses come off they are just dogs," said Gravitt. The dogs get along well and enjoy playing with each other when they are off-duty, he said.

Dilating drops were applied to the eyes of Lola and Yahtzee. Then both sat nicely in the waiting room for 20 minutes. The actual exams took just a few minutes.

Yahtzee's regular veterinarian thought he saw cholesterol deposits in his eyes, Johna Gravitt told Rachel Keller, a veterinary eye specialist known as an ophthalmologist.

"I see cloudiness related to his age. I do not see cataracts. For being almost 11 years old, Yahtzee looks terrific," Keller said.

Young Lola passed with flying colors.

Last year 7,400 animals that work and serve got free exams from 290 veterinary eye specialists in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico. The program is called the annual ACVO/Stokes RX National Service Animal Eye Exam Event.

...continued

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