



Lexie

Face of Philanthropy

Senior Lab Lexie supports a variety of good causes, including cheering senior citizens.



If a senior dog named Lexie could talk, her catchphrase would probably be, “How can I help you?”

The black Lab/Belgian Malinois mix – her mother was a Lab who worked in narcotics detection, and Lexie was born to an “oops” litter – constantly gives back at home as well as work, according to her mom, Janice Costa.

“She is my generous dog, my kind dog,” Costa said. “If I go take the garbage out, she goes with me. If I’m not feeling well, she’s with me. She learned early on to get me medicine and the phone. And when we go to camp, she’s the one that meets and greets all the dogs.”

The “camp” is Canine Camp Getaway, a dog vacation camp for people and their pets. Costa, a design writer and editor who is also an AKC Canine Good Citizen and therapy dog evaluator, hosts the weeklong camp twice a year (in June in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and September in East Durham, New York).

Lexie greets a senior friend.

Just Labs

Activities include hiking, swimming, dock diving, “barks and crafts,” agility, flyball, canine freestyle dancing, dog yoga (aka doga), lure coursing, disc games, karaoke, dog skateboarding, parkour, outdoor movies under the stars, scent detection, seminars with veterinarians and dog trainers, tricks testing for AKC titles, therapy dog testing, and, of course, yappy hours in the bar.

“The dogs go everywhere,” Costa said. “It’s our group so we take over the entire place – it’s just us.”

Lexie “sends” letters, emails, and social media posts to campers, including messages about charitable giving. Canine Camp Getaway hosts food drives, a 50/50 raffle, casino night fundraisers, and a holiday toy drive to help animal shelters, rescue organizations, and animal-welfare nonprofits, such as Marty’s Place Senior Dog Sanctuary in New Jersey and Paw It Forward Pet Food Pantry in New York.

Since 2009 – at Lexie’s behest – campers have donated more than \$50,000 to good causes.

“Our guests are incredibly generous,” Costa said. “When you are in a situation where you can take your dog on vacation, that is a tremendous luxury for you and your dog. And so many dogs don’t have the luxury of even having owners, or having food, having vet care. So we felt it was important to be able to do something for dogs who weren’t in that situation. We feel very, very fortunate that our guests love this idea of giving back as much as we do.”

Because Lexie communicates so frequently with campers, they often feel they already know her when they

arrive. While dogs returning to camp know the drill and happily head to their rooms, first-timers can seem nervous because they’re not sure what’s going on.

“Lexie will always go over and place herself next to a new dog,” she said. “You can see the calm just radiates. She’s a dog that is gentle and gives soft kisses to everyone. She’s everything you’d expect in a Lab.”

Lexie, 12, also keeps an eye on the pool, which is typically full of swimming Labs and golden retrievers. She’s a national dock diving champion who ditches her calm demeanor and can act like a “lunatic” when it’s time to dive and swim.

Her other foible: insisting on testing all the toys to make sure they squeak before campers arrive.

The rest of the time, she’s a steady presence. Lexie volunteers as the neutral dog during therapy dog testing because she’s unflappable and gets along with everyone.

Costa recently leveraged Lexie’s popularity when a call went out in her hometown of Bethpage, New York, for people to write letters to senior citizens to buoy their spirits during the pandemic. As a senior herself, Lexie “posted” a request in the private Facebook group for camp alumni, suggesting dogs write letters and share photos to help with the project.

She happily headed to her post office box each night with Costa, where they ultimately collected 46 letters as well as photos, candy, puzzle games, and other gifts for the seniors.



Lexie lounging by the pool.

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“Everything that was sent in was addressed to Lexie Costa,” she said. “And Lexie wrote several because she felt she should write more than one.”

It’s fitting that a senior dog inspired an outpouring of support for senior people, according to Costa.

“There’s nothing in the world like a senior dog. When you’ve lived with a dog for many years, you have so much history and your love just deepens every year,” she said. “There’s something absolutely precious about the calm companionship of a senior. You realize that just being around them makes the world better.”

Lexie was also a precious puppy. Maggie Greene, 17, first met Lexie in 2009, when she was a girl of just five years old and Canine Camp Getaway came to Roaring


Brook Ranch in Lake George, New York. Her late father, George Greene, owned the property, and Maggie had urged him to take a chance and allow 50 dogs onto the property.

She spent most of her time with Lexie.

“She was just a lovely dog,” Greene recalled. “Even though she was really young, she was great with me. From a five-year old’s perspective, this was the best dog in the whole entire world. She was a very stable, steady dog that just gave you a sense of safety, and almost a feeling of home, because you knew she was always going to be nice. She was always going to be kind.”

Over the years, their friendship grew as the camp returned each year. Greene assisted with therapy dog training and testing, and marveled that Lexie never reacted if another dog barked or snarled – she’d just lie down.

Thanks to her childhood experiences with Lexie and other dogs at Canine Camp Getaway, the teen plans to study to become a veterinarian and was just accepted into a university to major in animal science.

“Obviously, my love of animals did not appear out of thin air,” she quipped. “It grew and was able to form through dog camp and through having such strong connections with amazing dogs like Lexie.” 

For more information, visit: CanineCampGetaway.com.



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Lexie and her sister Kaylee.



Award-winning journalist **JEN REEDER** is former president of the Dog Writers Association of America. She became a self-proclaimed “crazy dog lady” after she and her husband adopted a lovable Lab mix named Rio. Visit her online at www.JenReeder.com.