

In the last year, our staff has been discussing the possibility of offering a Therapy Dog as part of our services. While everyone was in favor and several staff has dogs, no one wanted to take on the training responsibilities this year. We continued to look for other options. Many of my colleagues have encouraged us on this venture and after attending Mark Krause's workshop at the Chicago Convention, I was convinced we needed to make this happen, so our search for an answer continued.

In discussions with Jon Reichmuth while going through the funeral process for her mother, Shelly Rehmeier and Jon discovered they could help each other and many grieving families. Shelly and her dog, Dillon, an 8-year-old black Labrador Retriever, have been a Certified Therapy Dog team with the Omaha Chapter of "Love on a Leash" for 4 years. Love on a Leash provides volunteer certified therapy dogs to agencies and schools in the metro area. The certification process involves attending classes, testing, and evaluation by a certified team for 10 site visits. There are currently 90 certified dog/owner teams with Love on a Leash in this Chapter. Part of Dillon's commitment to the program is to participate in a minimum amount of Therapy hours and his funeral home visits help with his goal and add diversity to his training.

Dillon and Shelly have been providing comfort at Funeral Visitations since November 2019. They are an amazing addition to our team. Their presence at visitations and funerals can bring about a break in the sadness some visitors can feel. His gentle nudge can start an interaction with people and allow for a tender distraction. Dillon is fun to watch as he "works" the room and seems to find those individuals that are struggling the most. His calm demeanor is a tremendous help to many who are uncomfortable being at the funeral home and he is patient with over-zealous children, who want to hug and love him. Dillon has added another level of hospitality to our services. Dillon and Shelly have become a valuable addition to our staff.

One special story came from the daughter-in-law in a large family that was having some internal strife. She called to thank me for the perfect timing that "I" arranged to have Dillon come into the visitation room at a time of tension between several children. Dillon's presence seemed to melt away the tension and help the family to realize that their differences were not important. It created a moment of healing for the whole family. We all know that the "timing" was just by chance.

Besides therapy work, Dillon stays busy with many American Kennel Club and United Kennel Club events. He currently has the following titles: Champion Tracker, Canine Good Citizen, Novice Rally, Trick Dog Novice, Scent Work Advanced and Elite Nose Work.