

## Retired Educator Learning, Sharing New Tricks with Therapy Dog

After a career of more than 56 years in education, what does a retired educator do? One of our own decided to go back to school to learn and to teach.

Dr. John J. Cavan, former President of Southside Virginia Community College, now volunteers at schools, colleges and nursing homes with his dog, Bella. A Nationally Certified Therapy Dog, Bella is a four-year-old Goldendoodle who lives with Dr. Cavan and his wife, Ann, in Midlothian. Recently, Coco was added to the family; she is a half-sister to Bella, just six months old and already in class every Friday to eventually join the team.

Through Caring Canines, Bella became certified along with the Cavans to do this type of work. Each dog must pass the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizens test, which requires of good manners and basic obedience. In addition, each team (handler/dog) must pass the Alliance of Therapy Dogs Inc. or Delta Pet Partners test.

According to the mission statement, "Caring Canines' goal is to provide emotional support, comfort, encouragement and share the joy and health benefits that dogs bring to our lives. We are an extremely dedicated volunteer group that strives to improve the lives of the people we visit, our dogs, and ourselves."

Bella visits three class groups at Clover Hill Elementary and has been to Morningside and Sheltering Arms rehabilitation facilities. She also has attended classes at community colleges including SVCC.

Dr. Cavan said, "Bella and I love coming to visit John Hays' classes at SVCC where the students are a lot of fun and proactive with the therapy dog concept."

Dr. Hays, instructor of psychology, said "Dr. Cavan has graciously volunteered to address dozens of students in a variety of psychology classes with his new sidekick - Bella - a trained therapy dog - emphasizing the need for all students to dream the big dream - reach for the stars and make a difference in our world. During his many presentations, Dr. Cavan shared many stories about his life and how he now uses his "best friend" - Bella to connect to and reach out to many students of various ages and grade levels throughout the Commonwealth. Because of his oratory skills, personal experiences and captivating antics, the students at SVCC who have had the pleasure and honor of witnessing Dr. Cavan's presentations, always remark how very fortunate they are for having heard his life stories."

The Cavan clan has formed quite a team together. Bella is just a big ball of unconditional love and spreads the joy whenever she visits. Ann and John love sharing their special dog and enjoy making a difference to others, something the two have been doing for a long time.