

## Maritime Specialty Service Dogs Society Holds First Graduation



Maritime Specialty Service Dogs Society (MSSDS) graduates and trainers pose for a group photo following awards presentation at the Peg, Masstown. Left to right- Heather Logan and Dan, Kim Cavanaugh and Tee Jay, Ross McCabe and Sophie, Carrie MacKinnon, Isaac Carter and Ellie, Melanie Smith, Rebecca Schrader and Stacy McNutt and Timber. (Harrington Photo)

By Linda Harrington

Service dogs make an amazing difference in the lives of their owners but the unsung heroes are the special people who train these dogs. Their selfless generosity shows no boundaries.

Maritime Specialty Service Dogs Society (MSSDS) recently held their Graduation at the Peg in Masstown. Emotions ran high as stories of individual dogs, their trainers and owners reflected on how they all came together as a life changing unit.

Carrie MacKinnon is one of these unsung heroes. Two years ago, already owning three dogs of her own but with a keen interest in training and behavior, she enrolled in Heather Logan's Cloverfield Specialist Trainer program. The four level program culminates with training a service dog from start to finish.

This is when Carrie met Ellie, a delightful border collie, who has an emotionally charged life history of her own. Ellie's first owner wanted to train her but developed cancer soon after acquiring the furry bundle of energy and sadly passed away. The family decided to have her evaluated for the service dog program and she passed this with flying colors just as Carrie was ready to receive a dog for training. One-year-old Ellie came to live with Carrie and her husband Jamie on Feb. 12th, 2015. She was not house trained and all she knew was her name and the sit cue.

"It was basically like starting with an 8-week old puppy," laughs Carrie. "So before we could start service dog training we had to start with basic obedience." Carrie and Jamie were a training team from the start and Ellie fit in wonderfully with the other three MacKinnon fur-girls.

Isaac Carter, of Wallace was 12 years old when he was diagnosed with Epilepsy. His mother Naomi says it was a worrisome time for the family, never wanting to leave Isaac unattended in case he had a seizure. A friend told her about the service dog program and she contacted Heather Logan. After an interview, Isaac was immediately accepted into the program and this was coincidentally the time when Carrie was ready to start training Ellie for a specialized service.

Ellie started intensive training as a seizure response dog, ready to pick up on the first signs of a seizure and either run to get help or ring a bell.

Naomi explains what a huge relief it is to have Ellie partnered with Isaac. "Just having Ellie in Isaac's life has made him a lot calmer and happier. The medication he is on can make him tired and cranky and Ellie helps to brighten his days. Having Ellie help to alert us, if Isaac has a seizure, is the greatest blessing. Since Isaac started having seizures, he has had to have someone with him 24/7. He is thirteen now and teenagers do not want a parent around all the time. It gives Isaac much more freedom and lets him be a normal boy."

Service dogs wear a special vest when they are working and they are not to be approached or patted by anyone other than their owner while wearing their vest. Once the vest is off, they are normal fun loving dogs. The significance of the vest was observed by Isaac's dad first hand. "I was vacuuming and Ellie did not have her vest on. She came around the corner barking at the vacuum like it was some strange beast. The next time I had the vacuum out she happened to be wearing the vest and she never made a sound. In fact, she stepped right over the vacuum as if it wasn't there," says Josh.

Heather Logan has been training dogs since 2010 through



This photo shows the mutual love between Maritime Specialty Service Dogs Society (MSSDS) trainer Carrie MacKinnon and Ellie. Isaac Carter (right), who has been diagnosed with Epilepsy, is fortunate to have Ellie come to live with him full time. Ellie has been trained as a Seizure Response dog and will go get help or ring a bell if Isaac shows any signs of a seizure. (Harrington Photo)

Cloverfield Animal Behaviour Services with 24 graduates of the program and numerous more taking the course online. She says it has been a long process to establish the Maritime Specialty Service Dogs Society (MSSDS) and with only so many hours in the day she requires assistance. "We are now getting trainers at a level where they can begin training but I still do all the interviews for people who wish to adopt dogs in the Maritimes," says Heather. This is no easy process with 30 requests/week and only 5 dogs/year undergoing training. "We need more funding. We could do 20/year if we had more funding," she says.

Service dog training is completely volunteer. Melanie Smith, Heather's apprentice and one of her head trainers says it would cost about \$25,000 if the trainers were actually getting paid for their hours of work. The MSSDS Fund raises money to help pay for food, leashes and vet bills so volunteers do not have to incur these added costs.

It truly is a labor of love and on graduation day, tears flow freely. Carrie MacKinnon is handing the leash over to Isaac for one last time as Ellie goes to live full time with her new family. This day has such a huge mix of emotions, like seeing your child go off to college. You are so proud but it breaks your heart to see them go!

The emotional stories from those who have benefitting from a service dog reflected on the importance of the program. Russell McCabe suffers from PTSD and he says the hardest thing he has to do is to walk out the door in the morning. His dog Sophie, who was a rescue dog, helps make this easier for him. "It is so wonderful to see the compassion Heather Logan has for rescue dogs and giving them a second lease on life. In this case I get a second lease on life and so does Sophie," he says.

Isaac will continue to train with Ellie over the next few months and Carrie will be working with them. When asked if she will train a service dog again, she quickly says yes, but adds...not too soon!

For more information on service dog training in the Maritimes visit <http://www.cloverfieldbehaviour.com/> and <http://www.maritimeservicedogs.org>



Maritime Specialty Service Dogs Society (MSSDS) graduate Carrie MacKinnon cuts the graduation celebration cake after receiving her Level 4 Trainer Certification. (Harrington Photo)



Heather Logan, of Cloverfield Animal Behaviour Services and trainer Carrie MacKinnon join Service Dog Ellie and her new family, Isaac, Naomi and Josh Carter for a "family" photo. (Harrington Photo)

## Clair's Classics Antiques

Estate Appraisals, Liquidations.

Open weekends or by appointment.  
We buy anything old, Complete House Lots, Estate Appraisals

EMAIL [c.peers@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:c.peers@ns.sympatico.ca)  
<http://web.mac.com/clairpeers/>

Call  
**Clair Peers**  
(902) 897-5951  
or 895-0788



## 3 Music Events in Wentworth

By Hope Bridgewater

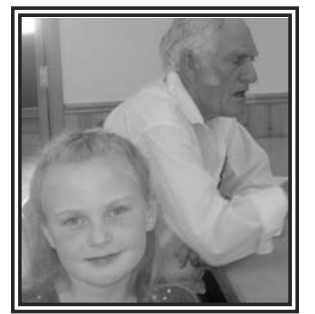
Music and joy go together as was recently proved in Wentworth on May 29 (Sunday Music Afternoon); June 25 (Matt Mays and Adam Baldwin) and June 26 (Sunday Music Afternoon). The Wentworth Sunday Music Afternoons feature Down East style fiddle tunes geared to the promotion of dancing to waltzes, polkas, hop-polkas, jigs, reels and foxtrots.

Singles are welcome, and couples allow dancing with one of their partners. All ages are welcome, but lately most of those attending are ages 40+ who like dancing to the Down East style. However, due to the Cape Breton influence, younger musicians and dancers are beginning to come. What is amazing is volunteer musicians often come from away as far as Halifax, Dartmouth, Truro, and many parts of rural Nova Scotia and south-eastern New Brunswick.

On stage they play in turn under the coordinator Dave Bagnell, Truro and backed by a band on the spot. There is no rehearsal ahead of time for this event, but with all this talent out there, the Afternoons are always a success. Some folks come to sit at the side tables and just listen to the Down East Music.

Musicians who played at these two events included David Bagnell, Claude Langille, Al McVicar, Robert Taylor, Budd Gavell, Gerald MacKenzie, Jessica MacDonald, Martha Forrest, Jim Mosher, Vivian Taylor, Betty Curry, Fred Phinney, Royal Hicks, Ben Gelleng (spelling correct?), and Bruce Gibson.

While the focus is on Down East musicians and dancing, coordinator David Bagnell gave Jessica MacDonald time on stage to sing a cappella two songs, "On Top of Spaghetti", and "How Much Is That Doggie in the Window?", and she received enthusiastic applause. Jessica's



Jessica MacDonald is shown after finishing singing two songs on stage at the Wentworth Recreation Centre during Sunday Music Afternoon. At her back is seated her grandfather, John Chapman. (Hope Bridgewater Photo)

grandparents, Muriel and John Chapman from Millvale were her chaperones and said, "Jessica is age 6 and in grade one at Oxford Elementary School. She likes to sing, dance, read and swim. She likes helping Nana cook and to set the table. She has a cat and likes Grandpa's horses."

On June 25, Matt Mays with special guest, Adam Baldwin, performed a splendid sell-out concert located at the Wentworth Recreation Centre. Matt Mays grew up in Cole Harbour, Nova Scotia, and is a well-known Canadian rock singer and composer.

He won the 2014 Juno Award for Rock Album of the Year. His special guest Adam Baldwin from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, is also a musician and song-writer. The concert was much admired by many. Lloyd Wilcox, a part-time resident of Wentworth, who works for Safety Services Nova Scotia and is an instructor of 55 Alive Mature Driving, exclaimed to me, "This was a magnificent, wonderful, wonderful concert!" Also, 92 year old Ben Legere from Lower Wentworth wrote "...enjoying the amazing Matt Mays and Adam Baldwin show in Wentworth."

Historic and local ties to your community and a full range of legal services

### Truro

10 Church St, PO Box 1068  
Truro, NS B2N 5B9  
Tel 902.897.2000  
Fax 902.893.3071

### Halifax

1801 Hollis Street  
Suite 2100, Halifax, NS B3J 3N4  
Tel: 902.405.8000  
Fax: 902.405.8001

### New Glasgow

47 Riverside St, PO Box 697  
New Glasgow, NS B2H 5G2  
Tel 902.752.5090  
Fax 902.755.3545

1.888.897.2001

[contactus@pattersonlaw.ca](mailto:contactus@pattersonlaw.ca)  
[www.pattersonlaw.ca](http://www.pattersonlaw.ca)

LAW  
**Patterson**