

## A Life Made Complete

By Lindsey Aspinall EI '01

Living in Michigan, **Jane MacFarlane Welker ZN '90** found out about **Paws with a Cause** many years ago. And so, when her hearing loss became much worse, she knew where to turn for help.

Paws with a Cause is a national organization which trains service dogs for people in need. After a lengthy application process including a home assessment and proof of need (providing various medical documents), Jane finally got to bring her new hearing dog home. Ukon, a golden retriever, was trained to provide various services for Jane. He was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and raised through a foster puppy raiser in the Grand Rapids area of Michigan.

"My life prior to getting Ukon has been very challenging and difficult in the last two years," Jane says. "Now that I have Ukon I am able to walk around malls, go out and meet my friends and family, and feel safe because he will let me know if someone is at the door." As a "Combo Dog" (a dog who was trained as both a hearing dog and a service dog) Ukon performs many tasks which have become difficult for Jane. He is trained to alert Jane of an intruder or a smoke alarm. He will also pick up items she has dropped, take clothes out of the dryer so she won't have to bend down and lose her balance, bring her items such as her keys, and help her walk and balance. "People take things for granted like going up stairs or taking clothes out of the dryer," she said. "Just today I took Ukon to the mall and climbed the stairs with him. I haven't been able to do that because I was afraid of falling. I felt it was such an accomplishment."

Because Paws with a Cause is a non-profit organization, Jane didn't have to pay for Ukon's extensive training. "I got Ukon through donations from Canton Civitains and Plymouth Lions as well as other donations," Jane explains. "Paws with a Cause works with the community to get donations so that the cost of training the dog is free for the client."

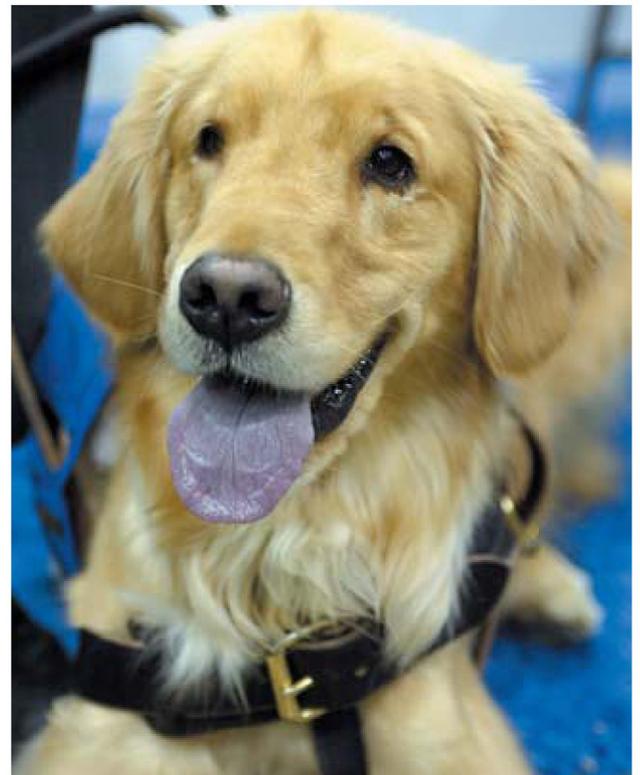
Jane first attended Ferris State University where she studied allied health. She later transferred to Madonna University where she studied gerontology, case management, and sign language. At Madonna, Jane learned to speak and communicate very well. "My mother, who is a person that worked with deaf and hard of hearing children, always advocated for me to be in the mainstream school system. If it wasn't for my mother, I would be signing and not speaking as I do today."

When she's not out and about with Ukon, Jane is working diligently for the Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns. Recently re-appointed by Governor Jennifer Granholm (D), Jane sits on the Commission doing advocacy and public policy for the disabled population in Michigan. The state has approximately 1.9 million disabled residents and the Commission works to aid these people through disability rights training, information and technical assistance, and coordinating disability awareness. The Commission also works with the Michigan Business Leaders Network on employment concerns for people with disabilities.

In addition to her work for the Commission, Jane is also very involved in Canton Township and has been appointed to several other advisory committees. As a member of the Advisory Board for the Area Agency on Aging, Jane helps to advocate for older adults and persons with disabilities. She also worked at the state and local levels for the Help America Vote Act, which aids people with disabilities in participating in the voting process.

Jane says that Ukon has been a true blessing in her life. He travels everywhere she goes and even stays under the table at restaurants. "He loves to be out in public and he just loves to help me," Jane says. With so many great things to say about Paws with a Cause and hearing dogs, Jane is anxious to share her story. She has already done several presentations on how Ukon has changed her life and even recently brought him to be introduced to the Ann Arbor Alumnae Chapter of Delta Zeta. "It is my hope that my Delta Zeta sisters understand what a gift a service dog like Ukon can be to someone who is profoundly hard of hearing. Most of all, I feel very safe again and will be able to live my life with confidence. Paws with a Cause has made my life complete."

*Below, Jane and Ukon recently performed at the Detroit Kennel Club Dog Show to educate the audience about service dogs.*



*"Ukon takes me to the door when someone rings the doorbell," Jane says. "His presence provides the stability I need to be active in my life."*