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## Goodworks

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# GOOD WORKS

**Colby alumni impact the world in many ways every day.**

In our “Good Works” section, we introduce you to alumni who are using their Colby education to make a difference in their communities.

# GET THAT DOG INTO THERAPY

**MARIAN LEEBURGER’S REMY WAS BORN TO SERVE**

BY KRISTIN YORKE '20 PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEB LINDSEY



Marian Leerburger '84 never intended for her rough collie puppy, Remy, to be anything but her always-waiting-by-the-front-door companion. Remy was simply the next addition to the family as her two other dogs—Cole, aging with Alzheimer's, and Riley, aging and deaf—were in need of some young energy to liven their spirits.

Then Leerburger noticed something odd. If Cole got stuck heading out to go to the bathroom outside, baby Remy would tug on his tail until he was free from the confines of the doggy door. If Cole couldn't make it up the stairs, baby Remy “stuck to him like glue” and encouraged him up those daunting steps.

After Cole's passing, Leerburger fondly reminisced about her dogs' special bond at the vet's office. “When I told the breeder and vet what Remy was doing, they told me that his behavior was not ‘normal’ and I needed to get him into ‘training.’ So I got certified as a national handler, which is the first step [an eight-hour course that now is online], and then found out what I needed to do to ‘train’ Remy.”

Luckily for the two of them, training for Remy was already complete. “Training consisted of making sure he could sit, lie down, and stay on command, and stay three minutes if I walked away. He could not take toys, bark at other dogs, jump, and could have no reaction to wheelchairs or when a metal pan fell to the floor, people yelling, people crowding him, or people petting him hard, as if they had cerebral palsy.”

A high bar? “None of that bothered him one bit,” Leerburger said.

Therapy dogs can be tested at a year old at the earliest. Remy, of course, passed at the minimum age and with flying colors. Now three and a half, Remy has taken his second test to re-qualify, and similarly passed on his first attempt. He is registered with Pet Partners, a national therapy dog organization, as well as Caring Canines, a local therapy dog organization based in Maryland.

Early on these organizations suggested groups for Remy and Leerburger to visit. However, an organization that was close to Leerburger's own work reached out to work with the pair: Wounded Warriors.



*Marian Leerburger '84 with Remy, a certified therapy dog that works with wounded veterans and others in the Washington, D.C., area. Leerburger has spent her career working in crisis situations in the military and defense sectors. Now, she and Remy work with combat veterans.*

Having spent her career working in crisis situations with military and defense personnel, Leerburger understands the stresses those working continual emergency situations endure. Wounded Warriors was the perfect organization for the pair. The two spend six to 10 hours per week volunteering, sometimes even more if there is a government holiday. As a working therapy dog, Remy is naturally intuitive and understands patients' needs. If a combat veteran has recently had leg or knee surgery, Remy does not stray from that person's side, allowing them to use his body as support for activities like walking down stairs.

"My favorite story," Leerburger recalls, "is from last year. We were in the hospital late one Friday night, and the paramedics brought in a man ... having a heart attack. Remy spent three hours with the nurses, doctors, and paramedics (about 10 people) standing around while they tried to bring the man back. He was comforting all those people."

Volunteer coordinator for Caring Canines Erin Bogan raves about Leerburger and Remy's instrumental contribution to the organization. "I am amazed by all the lives that Remy has touched and how many people he has reached," she said in an email. "He has offered peace to those grieving and calmed those in turmoil." The most remarkable thing about him? "Remy chooses who he helps and always chooses those who need him the most."

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—Erin Bogan,  
Caring Canines volunteer  
coordinator on therapy  
dog Remy

It wasn't just Remy's natural talent that influenced Leerburger's decision to get involved in such a service commitment. Leerburger also credits her alma mater. "Colby provided the ability to think critically and focus on diversity. A lot of our classes focused on working as a team. That type of team environment and diversity of opinion has led many of us to be more accepting of different backgrounds, ethnicities, and also people with physical and mental disabilities."

Leerburger was also pushed to get involved with service through her participation in Colby's chapter of Sigma Kappa; through the society's philanthropy program, Leerburger was heavily involved with the Waterville community. She volunteered and taught swimming lessons at the Waterville Boys & Girls Club. Her dedication to service and embracing diversity of community began on Mayflower Hill, she says, and has continued to grow since.

Remy is currently waiting to be registered with the American Kennel Club as a therapy dog with 500 hours of work, the top amount with which a dog can be registered. The duo were even scheduled to provide therapy on Capitol Hill to the House and Senate this November. Leerburger and Remy hope to continue helping and inspiring their community for many, many more.