



# Profile: Anne Evans

Judy Brinegar / The Courier-Tribune

**MAN'S BEST THERAPY** — Anne Evans says the resilience and versatility of Labrador retrievers, like Kota, is key to making them ideal therapy dogs. 'They have to have an excellent temperament around other dogs and people.'

## Dog enthusiast shares passion with veterans

*“But ask the animals, and they will teach you and they will tell you. In the Lord's hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.” (Job 12: 7, 9-10).*

**By Judi Brinegar**  
Special to The Courier-Tribune

**BENNETT** — Nestled in the woods on the edge of Randolph County is the farm of Anne and Neil Evans and the home to a troop of yellow and black Labrador retrievers.

The Evans family began its love affair with the gentle breed when their older daughter was a toddler.

“When Neil and I got married, we

were both very outdoorsy people,” Anne Evans said. “I had warned him before we even got married that I was an animal lover — love me, love my animals.

“When our children started coming along, we looked around and found a yellow lab. Her name was Penny and she had a really good pedigree. If you told me that one day we would be sitting where we are today, I would not have believed it.”

Evans' Duckback Labradors are bred carefully to promote versatility, soundness, trainability, excellent temperament as well as conforming

See **PROFILE**, page 2A

## Profile

From page 1A

to the standard. Over the years, their dogs have participated in many activities, including tracking, obedience, hunting, hunt tests and showing in the breed conformation ring. They have also served as guide dogs for the blind, hunting companions, obedience titled dogs and have been participants in conformation shows.

Anne Evans is currently qualified to judge the AKC Hunting Retriever test at the Junior, Senior and Master level.

In 2009, a new passion developed as Evans and her black lab Tori began making visits to the residents at the Bill Hefner Veteran's Administration Hospital in Salisbury. She obtained her Therapy Dog International (TDI) certification, which allows an individual to take a dog into various medical, nursing and assisted living homes or schools.

"I wanted to give something back," Evans said. "Neil's father was a World War II veteran and Neil is retired after 27 years with the Coast Guard Reserves, so my heart is very close to our veterans. The love of our labs is unequaled and I started thinking that a therapy dog would be a good way to share that love."

Evans said that the resilience and versatility of



## Profile

### Anne Evans

**Age** 64

**Hometown** Bennett

**Family** Husband, Neil; two daughters.

**Revealing** Evans is thrilled to be singing

with the Asheboro Community Choir. Due to surgery several years ago, the life-long singer found that she could not sing any more. "I had lost my voice for four or five years and I was devastated," she recalled. "My daughter saw Zoe Faircloth's sign and told her that she wanted to get her mama singing lessons. Zoe kept working with me and my voice came back — in two octaves!"

the breed is key to making them ideal therapy dogs.

"They have to have an excellent temperament around other dogs and people," she said. "They are intelligent, obedient and so loving, such well-grounded dogs."

The TDI certification for therapy dogs is very strict. Dogs must be a minimum of one year old and healthy. The handler must be of good character. Handlers under 18 must be accompanied by an adult on visitations. As these and other requirements are met, the dog and handler are evaluated.

Evans said that obedience training is a must for those considering volunteering with therapy dogs.

"For instance, they are tested by bringing in someone in a wheelchair," she said. "They get really close to the dog and observe how it reacts. This is important because they will be in situations at the hospital where there will be wheelchairs and elevators and automatic doors. They have to be trained to react correctly in those situations."

What is a trip to the VA hospital like for Evans and her therapy dog?

"Each time Tori walked up to the automatic opening doors, his ears would perk up and he became very excited," she said. "We would spend the day there, breaking for lunch and a 'nap time' for Tori. While some of the residents are either too sick or are not dog people, the

rest of them were so excited to see him. One resident, Kate Ryan, always made sure that she has cookies for him.

"We visited her last because he was worthless after his treat!"

Evans uses her dogs for breeding, raising no more than two litters a year. The waiting list is extremely long and she only sells "limited registration" animals. This means that no litter or offspring from this particular puppy can be registered with the AKC. However, those dogs which are registered as limited may participate in obedience, agility trials, hunting retriever tests, etc., but not in breed competition.

Sadly, lovable Tori passed away recently. His son, Kota, has taken over the role of therapy dog at the hospital.

Evans does encourage people to learn more about therapy dogs.

"Kota knows when he goes in the car and sees the doors at the hospital, his ears go up," she said. "He gets so excited. It's not really about me but to honor our veterans and what joy our dogs are able to give them."

■■■

For more information on Evans' labs, go to [www.duckbacklabs.com](http://www.duckbacklabs.com). For information on therapy dogs, visit *Therapy Dogs International* at [www.tdi-dog.org](http://www.tdi-dog.org).

■ **Contact:** [judi.brinegar@yahoo.com](mailto:judi.brinegar@yahoo.com)

## READER SERVICES