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## Dogs rehabilitated by Coyote Ridge inmates

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By TYLER RICHARDSON — Tri-City Herald

CONNELL, WASH. — Convicted murderer Danny Manoi never thought his temper would allow him to share a cell with someone of a different race, let alone a different species.

Manoi, 44, has a violent history. He routinely assaulted other inmates and bucked authority, he said. He's serving a 46-year sentence for killing an auto repairman in 1995.

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"I wasn't the nicest person," he admitted outside his cell at Coyote Ridge Corrections Center, a medium-security prison in Connell.

Now, however, there's a Great Dane named Hannah in his life, part of a program called Ridge Dogs. Inmates train and rehabilitate rescue dogs from Benton, Franklin and Adams counties who are candidates to be euthanized.

Prison staff were hesitant at first about the idea of letting Manoi work with dogs. But they say he's taken a "complete 360" since joining the program.

Hannah, who sleeps on a mattress in Manoi's cramped cell, strutted out from her bed to greet a group of visitors recently.

The tall black dog rubbed up against Manoi as he praised her for her welcoming demeanor. The high-pitched voice he used to show his approval provided a stark contrast to his bulky frame and prison tattoos.

"Very good," he said, patting the dog on her head. "Very good Hannah."

Manoi and 41 other prisoners rigorously train the dogs over a period of two to six months, sometimes longer, depending on the dogs' needs. Each dog is screened beforehand for overly aggressive behavior.

The dogs are provided by the Benton-Franklin Humane Society in Kennewick, Adams County Pet Rescue in Othello and Forgotten Dogs in Kennewick. The agencies provide the food, as well as microchips, vaccinations, spaying and neutering.

The dogs are offered to the public for adoption once the training is complete.

Ridge Dogs has grown immensely since it first was introduced at the prison in October 2010, said Lori Telleria, the prison's correctional program manager.

It started with six inmates and two dogs, partnered with one animal shelter. Now, more than 40 inmates train about 20 dogs at a time from three shelters.

The ultimate goal is to provide stable new homes for neglected dogs. They receive more than 200 hours of training and go through three different levels of instruction before they "graduate," said inmate Glenn Northrop, the program's clerk.

The inmates meet with certified trainers once a week and use methods certified by the Association of Pet Dog Trainers and the American Kennel Club.

Each dog is assigned three inmates, who split caring duties. One of the inmates, called a mentor, oversees the training and helps the less-experienced inmates - called handlers - develop the dog's social skills and behavior.

Elaine Allison, director of the Benton-Franklin Humane Society, said the inmates have impressed her with their knowledge during the training sessions she leads.

With their level of experience, many inmates could work as certified private dog trainers earning around \$200 an hour, Allison said.

"The skill level that these guys have is good enough for them to get their Certified Pet Dog Trainer certificate," she said. "You have to know your stuff to get that certificate."

Inside a training room, a pit bull mix with a brown and white coat named Billy Bob sat by an inmate's feet, eagerly eyeing another dog's treats.

Billy Bob was to walk out of the prison gates in a couple of hours with a potential new owner - who happened to be a counselor at the prison. It was a "trial" adoption to see if he could get along with the family's cat. The program is dogs-only, so mentors don't know how some dogs will react when placed in homes with other animals.

Billy Bob's mentor, inmate Darren McCarroll, 34, glowed with pride as he talked about the dog and the progress he made.

"It's a real happy feeling," said McCarroll, who worked with Billy Bob for two months. "I made a difference in a dog's life. He went from death row to living on the outside."

Billy Bob had trouble with the family cat and briefly returned to the prison. He now is living with another foster family.

More than 70 dogs have been adopted since the program started, Northrop said. Some are adopted by prison staff and the animal shelters help find homes for the others.

While the inmates teach the dogs valuable lessons they will use in their new homes, the dogs teach the inmates lessons they need to survive behind the walls of Coyote Ridge.

The dogs provide a new perspective on life and give inmates a reason to get out of bed in the morning with a positive attitude, inmate Tom Mason said.

Mason, 46, needed that positive influence when he joined the program two years ago, he said. He is serving a 20-year sentence for manslaughter and arson. He was involved in a standoff with a SWAT team in 2006 in Rochester that ended with his wife and cousin dying in a fire.

Helping the dogs taught Mason that his life was worth living again, he said.

"It gave me a second chance at life," he said. "I went from a pretty depressed inmate, to feeling like I got an early release."

Inmate Quest Jolliffe, 41, has been in the program since it started and has graduated more than 50 dogs. Inmates learn how to be leaders and foster a positive environment by interacting with the dogs, he said.

Jolliffe can see the effect the program has had on other inmates, he said.

"It can change other inmates' lives and get them thinking that life isn't all about being selfish," he said.

Ridge Dogs is hoping to grow the program by expanding to the minimum-security work camp located next to the prison, Telleria said. Right now there are two dogs at that camp and staff is hoping to place more there soon.

The validation inmates like Manoi get from training the dogs is unlike anything they have experienced behind bars or in their previous lives.

"It's by far the most rewarding thing I have done as an individual," he said.

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