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April 2026 | Edition 28 | Northern Virginia's Therapy Dog E-Letter



AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB



TDI

THE THERAPY DOGS INTERNATIONAL

The Landscape of Service: Navigating Rumors and Realities

As spring settles in across Northern Virginia, we've noticed a surge of conversation online about therapy dog organizations—particularly **Therapy Dogs International (TDI)** and its relationship with the **American Kennel Club (AKC)**. While social media can often amplify drama, recent developments have moved beyond mere rumor into documented policy shifts.



The Delisting: A Significant Shift

The most pressing question for many handlers is whether TDI remains an AKC-recognized partner. As of March 2026, the factual answer is **no**. Therapy Dogs International is no longer appearing on the AKC's official roster of recognized organizations.

While the AKC has not issued a formal "public explanation," this removal typically occurs when a registry fails to meet the AKC's strict requirements for liability insurance documentation or fails to provide the administrative support necessary to verify volunteer hours. For TDI, this follows a massive and prolonged server failure that began in late 2024, which effectively paralyzed their ability to process renewals or communicate with the AKC.

What This Means for You

For volunteers, this isn't just "politics"—it has practical consequences:

- **Title Eligibility:** Hours logged under a TDI certification are no longer eligible for new AKC Therapy Dog titles (such as \$THDN\$ or \$THD\$) until the organization is reinstated.
- **Exclusivity Friction:** TDI's longstanding exclusivity policy, which prohibits handlers from belonging to multiple registries, has left many volunteers in a difficult position: stay with a non-recognized organization or resign to join a recognized group like Alliance of Therapy Dogs.



Perspective: Impact Over Labels

For those who follow **Canine Concierge Corporation**, our priority remains helping you understand how programs operate: responsibly, ethically, and with an emphasis on temperament rather than titles.

While the loss of AKC recognition is a blow to the prestige of the TDI brand, it does not diminish the heart of the work. A dog’s ability to provide comfort in a local hospice or library is based on its training and sound handler judgment, not the status of a national server or a listing on a website.

Looking Ahead

As the conversation continues, our focus remains steady—advancing thoughtful, evidence-informed animal-assisted work throughout Northern Virginia. In this month’s Digest, you’ll find practical insights, seasonal highlights, and the stories that matter most: the quiet, consistent impact therapy dog teams continue to make every single day, regardless of the administrative weather.



Researchers discover humans, animals like the same sounds, proving Darwin theory right

What’s New This Month

Therapy Dog Watch

Regional Growth, New Research & Key Updates for Spring 2026



NYPPost.com | [US News](#)

Judge declares mistrial for man accused of killing neighbor's yellow lab after court therapy dog wanders into jury room

A reminder of how carefully therapy dogs must be managed in legal environments.

👉 [By Zoe Hussain](#) | Published March 11, 2026, 12:43 a.m. ET



Sentara®

Sentara Northern Virginia Medical Center Expands Therapy Dog Corps

As of early March 2026, the Woodbridge facility has expanded its therapy dog program from one team to five. New teams – including Hope (Alliance of Therapy Dogs–certified) and Hayden (mini Bernadoodle) – are now supporting high-intensity clinical areas such as the ICU and Emergency Department.

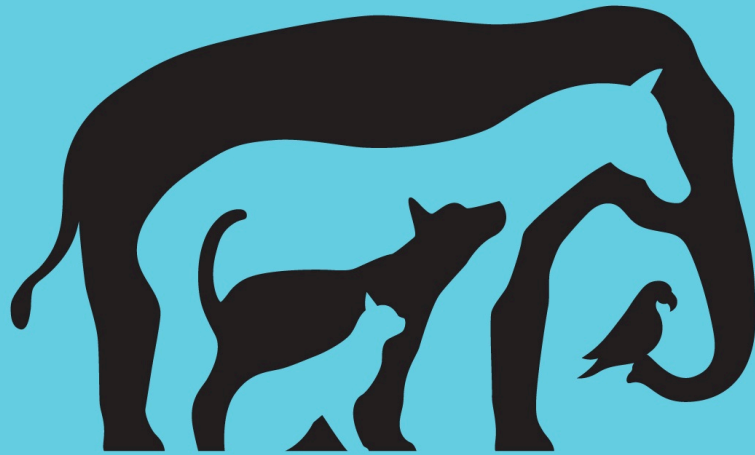
👉 Takeaway: Hospitals across NOVA continue integrating therapy dogs into frontline care environments.



VCU Research: Measurable Gains Against Loneliness

A March study from the VCU Center for Human-Animal Interaction found therapy dogs produced a “unique improvement” in loneliness among hospitalized psychiatric patients, outperforming standard social interaction interventions.

👉 Takeaway: Therapy dogs show distinct benefits in behavioral health environments.



MORRIS ANIMAL FOUNDATION

\$100K Research Opportunity Open

The Morris Animal Foundation is accepting proposals for new research focused on improving the working lifespan and emotional wellbeing of therapy and service dogs.

👉 **Deadline: April 29, 2026.**

Alliance of Therapy Dogs



sharing smiles and joy™

Alliance of Therapy Dogs Updates Visit Protocol

Effective March 1, 2026: therapy dogs may no longer carry toys in their mouths while interacting with individuals due to injury risk. Toys remain permitted for structured exercises when transferred by handlers.

👉 Takeaway: Expect updated visit training emphasis across programs this year.



Opportunities & Recruitment (Virginia)

VCU Dogs on Call Recruiting New Teams

👉 <https://health.students.vcu.edu/dogs-on-call/>

Blue Ridge Mountain Therapy Dogs Recruiting Volunteers

👉 <https://www.blueridgemtndogs.org/>

Interested in volunteering? [Start here](#) →



We're Preparing a New Program for Eligible Veterans to Receive a Free Companion Animal

Some battles do not end when you come home. Isolation, disrupted routine, and the weight of stress can linger for years. Battle Buddies helps close an immediate gap by offering a healthy, temperament-screened companion animal, matched thoughtfully, with the upfront costs covered, so a veteran can say "yes" without money being the barrier.

We're preparing to launch our Battle Buddy companion animal program that will allow veterans the opportunity to adopt a companion animal from select shelters free of charge.

Purple Heart Foundation

Sponsor A Pet

This program is not a service-dog placement initiative; it focuses on companion animals for emotional support and daily connection.



Where Creativity Meets Compassion

In Charlottesville, a remarkable blend of artistry and purpose is shaping the next generation of highly trained service dogs. *Art Unleashed*, an annual creative initiative supporting **Service Dogs of Virginia (SDV)**, brings together local artists, dog lovers, and community partners to raise awareness and funding for life-changing canine partnerships.

SDV trains and places service dogs in four key areas: mobility assistance, autism support, psychiatric service, and medical alert. Each dog begins as a curious puppy and progresses through months of structured training, socialization, and skill development—guided by professional trainers and dedicated volunteers. The result is a confident, reliable partner capable of transforming daily life for an individual or family.

CBS 19 News | Instagram Artist

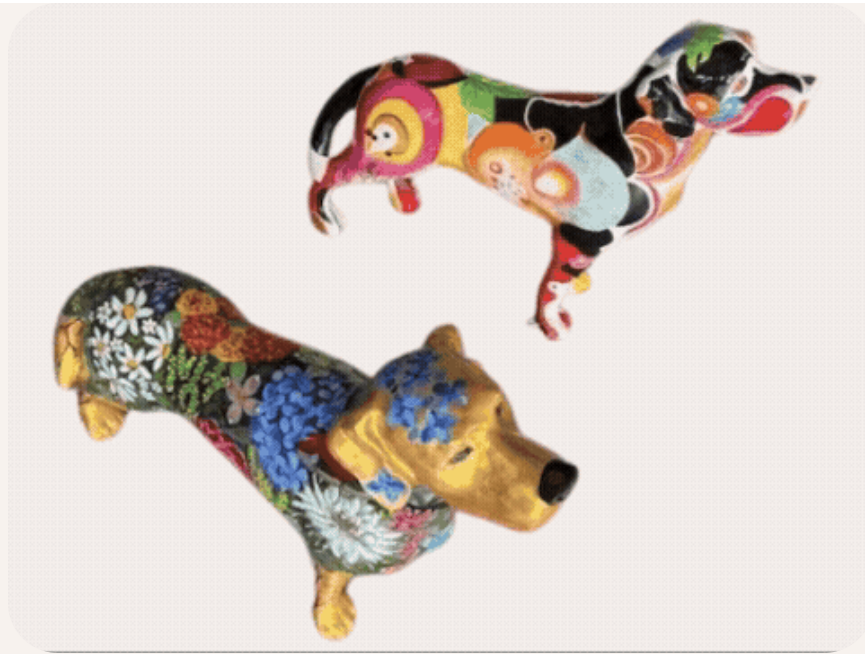
Exclusive look at the creative process



A Spotlight on Service Dogs of Virginia

Art Unleashed celebrates this journey through original artwork inspired by SDV dogs and their handlers. Paintings, sculptures, and mixed-media pieces capture the quiet determination of a dog learning a new task, the bond between handler and partner, and the joy of independence restored.

Beyond the gallery walls, the event underscores a simple truth: service dogs are not just trained—they are cultivated with intention, compassion, and community support.



On public display throughout Charlottesville from June to August and then available to purchase at the auction in October.



Meet the adorable service dogs behind the athletes of the 2026 Paralympic Winter Games

Air Travel, ESAs & Service Dogs in 2026 – What Actually Applies

Recent national updates highlight one consistent theme: confusion persists around Emotional Support Animals (ESAs), service dogs, and air travel. Here's what handlers and advocates should clearly understand heading into spring travel season.

✈️ ESAs & Air Travel: The Bottom Line

Airlines are **no longer required** to treat Emotional Support Animals as service animals under federal rules. Most carriers now classify ESAs as pets, meaning standard pet policies – including carrier requirements, fees, and size restrictions – typically apply.

👉 Practical takeaway:

If you plan to fly with an ESA in 2026, confirm your airline's current pet policy in advance and expect standard pet travel procedures.

🐕 Service Dogs: Federal Protections Remain Strong

Under U.S. Department of Transportation regulations:

- Only **dogs** qualify as service animals for air travel.
- Psychiatric Service Dogs (PSDs) must be treated the same as other service



📊 ESAs in 2026: Growth + Ongoing Confusion

Recent national data shows ESAs remain highly visible across housing and mental-health settings, with growing demand and evolving public attitudes. At the same time, inconsistent state policies and misinformation continue to create uncertainty for many handlers navigating their rights.

👉 Practical takeaway:

ESA protections still primarily arise under the **Fair Housing Act**, not travel law.

✓ Know Before You Go (Quick Guide)

- ESAs = housing protections (not airline access rights).
- Service dogs = protected under DOT rules for air travel.
- Airlines may require advance forms for service dogs.
- Always check carrier policies before booking.

dogs.

• Airlines may require behavior, health, and training attestation forms before departure.

👉 Practical takeaway:

Handlers should review airline forms early and prepare documentation ahead of travel day.



Lyft to uphold rights of disabled passengers with service animals



By [STEVE KARNOWSKI](#) | Updated 5:23 PM EDT, March 11, 2026



What's Happening Around NOVA (April)

April 4 (Saturday)

Petalpalooza

Time: 1–9 PM

Location: Capitol Riverfront (Navy Yard, DC-adjacent)

Highlights: Large outdoor festival, live music, fireworks, dog-friendly crowds

Link: <https://nationalcherryblossomfestival.org/event/petalpalooza>

April 8 (Wednesday) – Recurring

Sit. Stay. Sip. Dog Social

Schedule: Wednesdays throughout April

Location: National Landing Water Park / Crystal City

Highlights: Midweek social for commuters + pups

Link: <https://nationallanding.org>

April 11 (Saturday)

SPCA of Northern Virginia Adoption Fair

Time: 1–3 PM

Location: Weber’s Pet Supermarket, Fairfax

Link: <https://spcanova.org/events>

April 11 (Saturday)

Potomac Valley Golden Retriever Club Field Training Day

Time: 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Location: Rover’s Content Field (MD/NOVA border region)

Highlights: Training day + large Golden gathering

Link: <https://pvgrc.org/events/april-field-training-day/>

April 12 (Sunday)

Del Ray Dog Fest

Time: 11 AM–3 PM

Location: George Washington Middle School, Alexandria

Highlights: Dog yoga, lure course, fashion show, distracted dog race

Link: <https://www.delraydogfest.com>

April 12 (Sunday)

Friends of Homeless Animals (FOHA) Adoption Event

Time: 1–4 PM

Location: Fleetwood Farm Winery, Leesburg

Highlights: Winery setting + adoptable dogs

Link: <https://foha.org/events>

April 17 (Friday)

Potomac Valley Golden Retriever Club PVGRC Specialty

Time: 12:00 PM - 6:00 PM

Location: Maryland State Fairgrounds - 2200 York Rd. Timonium, MD

Highlights: The AKC approved our judging panels, and the committee began its work to offer a great afternoon of conformation, obedience, and rally trials, and of course, raffles!!

Link: <https://pvgrc.org/events/2026-pvgrc-specialty/>

April 18 (Saturday)

ALX Dog Walk

Time: 7-11 AM

Location: Oronoco Bay Park, Alexandria

**Highlights: 4th annual Old Town walk, sustainability fest, contests
The first 500 participants with a reusable mug get free coffee. It's worth the early wake-up call!**

Link: <https://www.alxdogwalk.com>

April 18 (Saturday)

Anything's PAWSible 5K

Time: Late morning start + festival

Location: Manassas Museum Lawn

Highlights: Dog-friendly 5K supporting service dogs for children

Link: <https://www.apawsible5k.com>

April 25 (Saturday)

SPCA of Northern Virginia Adoption Fair

Time: 1-3 PM

Location: Weber's Pet Supermarket, Fairfax

Link: <https://spcanova.org/events>

April 30 (Thursday)

Metropolitan Washington Dachshund Club Spring Field Trials

Location: Tri-County regional venue (rotating)

Highlights: Competitive scent-work field trials

Link: <https://www.mwdachshundclub.org>

Ongoing Recurring Mentions

Caboose Tavern – Ruff Tuesdays

Locations: Vienna & Fairfax

Dog-friendly patio + trail crowd regular

<https://caboosebrewing.com>

Settle Down Easy Brewing

Locations: Falls Church & Oakton

Consistently dog-friendly patio hangout

<https://settledowneasybrewing.com>

Got a therapy dog story? We want to hear it! POST

(It will be featured in a future DaVinci Digest)



Pint-sized dog breed is US' most popular for fourth year running

By Marissa Matozzo

Published March 18, 2026, 4:34 p.m. ET

French Bulldogs held strong at No. 1, followed by Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, and German Shepherds.

[Devastated dog dad's 4 adorable bulldogs missing after NYC walker never returned with pups: owner](#)



Oronoco Bay Park, Old Town Alexandria, VA.

ALX Dog Walk Returns for Its Fourth Year — Loyal to Pets and the Planet

Old Town's signature spring tradition is back. On April 18, the ALX Dog Walk will once again transform Oronoco Bay Park into a celebration of dogs, sustainability, and community spirit. What began as a neighborhood initiative has grown into one of the region's most anticipated dog-friendly events, drawing families, volunteers, and eco-minded organizations from across the DMV.

This year's walk features a shoreline route along the Potomac, a sustainability fair, contests, vendor booths, and the beloved "green carpet" photo moment. The first 500 participants who bring a reusable mug will receive free coffee—a small but meaningful nod to the event's environmental mission.

Whether you're walking in memory of a pet, supporting a local rescue, or simply enjoying the spring air with your dog, the ALX Dog Walk remains one of the most joyful ways to welcome the season in Northern Virginia.

[Read more →](#)

Spring brings a surge of new teams preparing for evaluations, and it's a good moment to revisit how different organizations define readiness

Therapy Dog Certification Test Time

Despite what many believe, there is no single 'therapy dog certification test.'

There is no universal governing body for therapy dog certification.

Each organization evaluates temperament, handler teamwork, and real-world readiness differently.



Therapy dog evaluations vary widely by organization, setting, and visit expectations



Explore how different organizations evaluate therapy dogs

Coming this June in Northern Virginia...

Animal Expedition 2026 Comes to Reston Town Center



A beloved Northern Virginia tradition returns — **Animal Expedition 2026** (formerly *Pet Palooza*) is set to bring a lively mix of animals, family fun, and community engagement to Reston Town Center.



Event Details

June 7, 2026 | 11:00 AM – 3:00 PM
11900 Market St, Reston, VA
Free admission

Highlights

- Petting zoo & reptile exhibits
- Live DJ, face painting & kids' activities
- Adoption groups & local pet resources

- New pavilion experiences, including agility demos and puppy yoga



Get Involved

Exhibitor and sponsorship opportunities are available, with space limited.

👉 Learn more / apply to exhibit = katie@myerspr.com



↑ [Click for more of the exciting details](#) ↑

From the Page to the Floor Request a Visit

We don't just write about the "emotional thaw"—we deliver it.



The certified therapy teams are currently "back on the floor" across Northern Virginia, bridging the gap between clinical care and human connection. Whether you are seeking a moment of calm for healthcare staff, a literacy boost for students, or a neurological "reset" for patients, Canine Concierge is ready to serve.

[Request a Therapy Dog Visit](#)



Leo's Legacy, and Why Kuwait Feels Personal This Month

Some stories never really leave us. They simply wait for the right moment to remind us where everything began.

For me, that story is Leo.

Long before Canine Concierge Corporation took shape, before the *DaVinci Digest* was ever imagined, there was one remarkable dog whose life changed mine in ways I could not have predicted. Leo came from Kuwait, where I adopted him as a puppy when I was an IT contractor for the Army, and later brought him home with me to the United States in 2011. He was more than a companion. He was family, a steady presence, and ultimately part of the spark behind the work that would follow.

This month, hearing Kuwait in the headlines again struck a deeply personal chord.

When a place once tied to love, rescue, and hope suddenly reappears in the context of conflict and uncertainty, it has a way of stopping you in your tracks. It reminds you that behind every country name is a landscape of lived experience, memory, and connection.

For me, Kuwait will always be more than a dateline. It is part of Leo's story. And Leo's story is part of mine.

His legacy lives on not only in memory, but in mission.

In many ways, Leo helped inspire the heart behind Canine Concierge Corporation and the spirit of the *DaVinci Digest*: a belief in comfort, connection, compassion, and the extraordinary impact a dog can have on a human life. He remains a reminder that healing

often begins quietly – through trust, companionship, and the unspoken bond between a person and a dog.

That is why, even in unsettling times, I find myself returning to gratitude.

Gratitude for Leo’s life. Gratitude for what he awakened in me. Gratitude for the path that followed, and for the growing community that now shares in this work of advocacy, education, and encouragement. If this month’s news has reminded me of anything, it is that the legacy of one beloved dog can travel far beyond a single place or moment. It can become the foundation for something lasting.

[Leo’s legacy](#) is still here.

It lives in every effort to honor the human-animal bond, in every story that uplifts the work of therapy dogs, and in every step forward taken with compassion at the center.

And this month, especially, I wanted to say his name.

Leo.

– Michael Stokes

How to Sponsor a Future Therapy Dog



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Michael Stokes, Executive Director

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