



Photo by Sherri Coner Eastburn

April Williams of G.H. Herrmann Funeral Home in Greenwood, with Lady, the facility dog they recently brought into the funeral home to offer comfort to grieving families.

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When young children recently lost their father, they were pleasantly surprised at the funeral home when a sweet-natured Golden Retriever gently placed herself within hugging range. The children didn't leave the funeral home with the usual sad memories of sitting quietly for hours or milling around the casket in a crowd of grieving relatives and friends.

Their experience with death was definitely softened by the presence of Lady, the facility dog, said Jeff Herrmann of G.H. Herrmann Funeral Home in Greenwood. "Those children spent almost the entire evening with Lady," Herrmann said.

The idea of adding Lady to the funeral home staff bloomed during a discussion with Herrmann's friend, Kevin Knartzter, director of training and client services at Paws & Think. This non-profit organization, launched in 2001 by Gayle Hutch-

ens, a registered nurse, recognizes the many emotional benefits of canine contact during crisis or long term illness and trauma.

As a third generation funeral director, Herrmann said he was initially skeptical of the idea yet also intrigued. "My family has always looked for something more to offer families," he said. "We were always looking for another tool to help people in their grief."

Because Knartzter trains many dogs at his Southside home, he often had dogs in his company when the two friends met. Herrmann noted that wherever they went with a dog in tow, people responded positively. Herrmann began to think that Lady's presence might just be the extra something comforting that he and his family spent years trying to find.

Since her arrival a few weeks ago, Lady has shown Herrmann that he made an excellent decision. Her place is definitely in the funeral home.

During the day, Lady spends quiet down time hours resting in the office, not far from the patting hand of a staff member. When families visit to make funeral arrangements or attend services, the staff sees that Lady's presence has a healing affect on hearts of all ages, Herrmann said.

Every evening, Lady goes home with Byron Murphy, another funeral home director at G.H. Herrmann. Lady's ability to interact so tenderly with families gives them something unexpected and special moments during such a trying time in their lives, said G.H. Herrmann Funeral Home manager, April Williams. "She provides a real comfort to families in many ways," Williams said. "When people come in, Lady is a true magnet."

Lady definitely has the good life, Herrmann said with a smile. She gets back as much as she gives, not only from grieving families but from adoring funeral home staff as well.

"She gets loved on and she gets treats all day," he said.