Hearing Dog HALO lets Jeff know it’s time for PAWS for Lunch. Won’t you join us? The tour starts inside...
We moved to our 4646 Division Avenue home in 1995. The buildings and property are all mortgage-free -- part of PAWS’ long commitment to using our donors’ gifts wisely.

I N THE YEAR SINCE we hosted our first PAWS for Lunch tour, we’ve heard “I had no idea” a lot.

If you’re not aware, PAWS for Lunch is a behind the scenes look at Paws With A Cause. We provide lunch during these hour-long programs, held Thursdays bimonthly (and occasional Saturdays) at our National Headquarters. Guests who attend learn about PAWS history, tour the three buildings on our 8-acre campus, and meet some of our staff, volunteers and a client.

Most folks who come to PAWS for Lunch are from the greater West Michigan area. But here’s the thing: PAWS has friends in all 50 states. About half live in Michigan. Of those, about a third live in West Michigan.

So we thought – since so many are unable to attend in person – we’d use this issue of Dogs for Dignity to take you on a PAWS for Lunch tour in print.

 Sadly, we can’t send you lunch, too. Our recommendation? Read this over your own lunch hour – it’ll be like you’re here.

When you’re finished, would you please pass it on to a friend or colleague who’s in need of lunchtime reading material? It’s the one thing before saying goodbye that we’d ask you to do if you joined us in person – tell a friend about PAWS for Lunch.

Bon appétit.

Team PAWS

PS – We’d love to see you, if you ever do find yourself in the neighborhood. Just call us at 800-253-7297 to arrange a time to stop by!

A TASTE OF PAWS HISTORY

WHEN YOU ARRIVE for PAWS for Lunch, the first thing you’d probably note is our location. Our National Headquarters is nestled amid commercial firms and farmland in Wayland, Michigan, about 20 miles south of Grand Rapids.

After you check in and pick up your lunch (usually sandwiches and cookies), you’d eat and mingle in our conference room with others on the tour. A PAWS Board member would officially welcome you and introduce Mike Sapp, PAWS’ CEO and Co-founder, who’d share some of our history and future vision.

Mike would tell you PAWS got its start in the late 1970s, when a friend asked if Mike would train his dog for him. Mike’s friend and his wife are deaf, and they had just adopted a young child. They wanted their dog to alert them when he cried, and to other common sounds.

Mike would admit he wasn’t sure he could do what they’d asked, but agreed to give it a try. Confirmation he’d succeeded came the night he went to his friends’ house for their regular training session and was greeted by a roomful of people. Mike thought at first they were all there to observe. “Oh, no,” said Mike’s friend, “they’re all deaf. They want you to train their dogs, too.”

Since then, PAWS has grown and prospered. We’ve placed more than 2,500 Assistance Dogs with people with disabilities over the last 34 years. In 2012, we paired 62 new Client Dog Teams and served more than 450 additional Teams across 36 states.

Mike would tell you the need for PAWS’ services isn’t going away. Last year alone we received more than 1,500 application requests for Assistance Dogs. Then he’d invite you to see what we’re doing to meet that need.
During retrieve training, our dogs learn to pick up anything from a hammer to a dime! Nine months, depending on the type of dog and tasks necessary for the client.

Finally, they’d have the dog demonstrate its retrieval skills and other tasks. Let’s just say that watching a dog pick up a credit card without mangling or slobbering all over it never gets old!

A client with limited hand dexterity might need a different style hand strap on their dog’s pack. R&D outfits each PAWS Team with the tools they need to work together.
After R&D, you’d head outside to the Canine Evaluation Center (CEC). The first two phases of dog training happen there. It’s also where our Vet Team operates. Walking through, you’d see the surgical room where Dr. Jeanne (PAWS’ Veterinarian) spays or neuters and does other routine procedures for our dogs. She and Theresa, our Vet Tech, can even perform C-sections when one of our Breeding Stock females might need one. You’d also glimpse the x-ray room and hear we take x-rays of all PAWS Dogs’ elbows and hips to be sure they’re strong and healthy.

In 2012, 163 PAWS Puppies were born. If we didn’t have our own Vet Team, it’d cost us more than $200,000 for puppy health care alone!

Dr. Jeanne would tell you she sees each PAWS Foster Puppy nine times before it even begins formal training. It’d cost an average of $1,300 per puppy for those same services at a local vet’s office.

Before you move on to our last building, Dr. Jeanne would mention that there are additional vet services – like a second series of hip x-rays, for example – she’d love to give our dogs if PAWS had the resources. Some day!

He CANINE Development facility (CDF) is home to our Breeding and Foster Puppy Teams. Once you’re inside, Mike would confess one of PAWS’ biggest challenges is making sure we have the right dogs to meet our clients’ needs. Occasionally, we purchase or receive donated puppies from breeders, or obtain dogs from area shelters or rescues. But we’ve found breeding our own dogs is much more cost-effective and successful. Historically, about 1 in 12 rescued dogs completes training. Nearly 1 in 2 PAWS-bred puppies goes on to become an Assistance Dog.

Mike would explain developing a successful Assistance Dog involves nature and nurture. The Breeding Team focuses on the nature side. Their work is vital to ensuring PAWS has a steady supply of healthy puppies with the temperaments needed to thrive as working dogs. Volunteer Host Homes care for our Breeding Dogs and help us whelp the puppies that will come back to PAWS at 18 months old for their formal training.

Our Foster Puppy Team covers the nurture. And you’d meet Julie, our Foster Puppy Coordinator. She assigns each PAWS Puppy to a volunteer Raiser. PAWS Puppies live with their Raisers for about 16 months. In that time, they learn basic obedience, visit all the types of places they may go with their clients...and get lots of love!

In 2012, Breeding Hosts and Foster Puppy Raisers like Pete and Kay Luce collectively volunteered more than 1.7 million hours caring for PAWS Dogs.

Hosting a Breeding Dog or raising a Foster Puppy takes effort and dedication. Before you leave the CDF, Julie would introduce two amazing volunteers to you. Pete and Kay Luce are raising their 9th Foster Puppy, and host a PAWS Breeding Dog! Kay would share that they knew they wanted to get involved as Raisers as soon as they heard about it. A lifetime of experiences made them want to raise a puppy that would help someone less fortunate.

Kay would confess each puppy brings a lot of work. But she’d assure you they love the process. And she’d admit: yes, turning each puppy back in to PAWS is by far the hardest part. Then she’d share that when asked how they do it, she and Pete simply talk about the times they’ve seen a PAWS Dog change a person’s life. That makes it all worth it.
Jeff & HALO
A Client’s Story

By now, the tour would have about 15 minutes left, and you’d make your way back to the Headquarters conference room to wind up the hour. Once you’re resettled, Mike would introduce Hearing Dog Team Jeff and HALO. This is the story Jeff would tell you:

Jeff was born with a profound hearing loss which, as often happens, wasn’t discovered until he was about 4 years old. His mother took him to the doctor because he wasn’t talking yet. After examining Jeff, the doctor declared him cognitively impaired. Jeff’s mom refused that diagnosis; she knew her son was a bright boy.

Eventually, she found a doctor who noticed Jeff didn’t react to noises made from behind his back, out of sight. It turned out Jeff can just barely discern exceptionally loud or nearby sounds. He would describe it by asking you to imagine rocking on your shoulder a baby screaming at the top of her lungs … Painful, right? Without his hearing aids, Jeff would hear only a faint cry.

He’d go on to share that he received his first PAWS Dog, Lacey, back in 1986! Jeff applied for a Hearing Dog when he and his first wife had a son. He wanted to be sure he’d know when his baby cried while they were home alone together, especially during the night.

Jeff would recount for you the time he realized he could absolutely trust LACEY to do her job. In the wee hours one morning, LACEY pawed at Jeff to wake him. He got up and rushed out of his bedroom after her, heart pounding, sure something terrible had happened to his son (who was about five years old by then). In the hallway, Jeff turned towards Aric’s room.

It took Jeff a moment to realize LACEY was behind him. He turned and looked; she wanted Jeff to follow her into the kitchen. He shook his head at her – Aric’s room was the opposite direction. Why wasn’t LACEY going the right way?

Turns out, she was. Jeff trailed LACEY into the kitchen and found Aric. He was proudly standing at the family’s new refrigerator, helping himself to a cup of water from the in-door dispenser!

After LACEY passed away, Jeff applied for and received Successor Dog HALO. Eleven years later, Jeff would grant that no two Teams are alike. He’d also say that just as his disability is a part of him, HALO is a part of him, too. He can’t imagine what life would be like without her help. HALO gives Jeff confidence. She allows him to be more social, to go and meet people.

Jeff would close by thanking the many friends of PAWS who help make this possible, for him, and all PAWS clients.
Paws With A Cause® enhances the independence and quality of life for people with disabilities nationally through custom-trained Assistance Dogs. PAWS® increases awareness of the rights and roles of Assistance Dog Teams through education and advocacy.

To receive PAWS communications electronically, email your request and name to: gogreen@pawswithacause.org

If you’re a long-time friend of PAWS, you may recall one of our long-standing traditions has been publicly recognizing our newly-certified Client Dog Teams. Historically, we printed their names and photos here in *Dogs for Dignity*.

We’re delighted to let you know that the certification listings we used to print in our newsletter will now be published on the PAWS website blog! Our “Certification Celebration” posts will also be shared on our Facebook page. They’ll be a recurring feature at the end of each month.

We know you’re as proud and happy for our Teams as we are. After all – you helped make them possible! You can see all the Teams we missed congratulating in print for their certifications in the series of “catch up” Certification Celebration posts up on the PAWS blog now. And please plan to join us there or on Facebook each month to cheer our newest Teams for their achievements!

You can congratulate Hearing Dog Team Valorie and NIGEL with us at the PAWS blog on our website: www.pawswithacause.org/new-events/blog