

## Innovative - Janet M. Severt, Orange City - Nominated by Marsha Willett

I met Janet Severt, Executive Director of New Horizons Service Dogs, in August of 2007, the Orange City facility is a constant bevy of activity: people and puppies (30 as we speak) dogs running and jumping and playing and laughter and loud voices so that you can be heard over the barking dogs. It is positively crazed. And, it is absolutely amazing.

Janet breeds, raises, trains and certifies service dogs that are placed with people who have mobility limitations and restrictions. When I first met her, I was impressed with the energy level and activity—you know the old physics adage—a body in motion tends to stay in motion unless acted upon by an outside force...that is Janet. She will finally stop when exhaustion sets in. Here's an example: One afternoon Janet stated that she had put 37,000 miles on her new van in the last 8 months; my response: "Gee, you don't get out much."

Try telling Janet that she can't do something and she'll prove you wrong—not out of sheer obstinacy but more from a sense of accomplishment. She uses the experience of overcoming obstacles as a learning tool that she incorporates into curriculum for her team training sessions, where dogs and people with disabilities are partnered prior to placement.

As a quadriplegic since age seven from a blood clot in her spine, Janet Severt, has dedicated her life to helping others with disabilities. During college she helped establish services for disabled students that included adaptive sports, test taking alternatives and recreational opportunities. Janet competed and excelled in wheelchair sports and was chosen for several USA International Teams in the early 1980's.

Growing up in the era of no accessibility, no curb cuts or wheelchair equipped accommodations, Janet was instrumental in educating the community on the needs of persons with disabilities. Janet also became a puppy raiser for "The Seeing Eye" organization at age eleven; this experience later evolved into her vision and the eventual establishment of New Horizons Service Dogs, Inc. in 1995. Janet has successfully founded, nurtured and grown her service dog organization into a viable operation.

As a result of her efforts, New Horizons has gained a positive reputation among people with disabilities throughout the state. Janet is a service dog user and can easily assimilate and formulate strategies to address the needs of the canine/client partnership.

The example she sets for herself, her clients and all the rest of us illustrate just how high she sets her standards and expectations. Her innovative standards are pervasive and integrated into every aspect of New Horizons Service Dogs program.

There are no excuses she hasn't heard. There is no obstacle that she hasn't confronted. She may not have overcome all of them. But, let me assure you she doesn't let that stop her.