Service Animals

Service dogs complete a lengthy and rigorous training program with their owner in order to achieve certification as a service animal. Service animals, typically dogs, are trained to provide their owner with valuable assistance in completing everyday tasks, monitoring symptoms of illness, and providing a level of safety to that person. When one approaches an individual with a service dog, there are important things to remember before you interact with that person and their dog:

- **The dog is working** – when out in public, service dogs have certain responsibilities to their handler. It is vital that the dog’s attention stay focused on their person. **Greet the owner and ask before interacting with the dog** – Many people love dogs and it is exciting to see them out in public. Before you reach down to pet that dog, ask the owner first. And be willing to respectfully accept “no” to your request.

- **Follow the owner’s instruction when interacting with the dog** – Because of the importance of their job, service dogs have different rules for behavior than do pet dogs. Follow the owner’s lead: that person may have you wait for the dog to sit before you pet the dog, or ask that you not let the dog lick your face, or that person may have other instructions for how the dog must behave. Respecting and following the owner’s instructions will help avoid the possibility of the dog learning bad habits that may jeopardize its ability to help the owner.

- **Ask thoughtful questions** – We are often intrigued when we see an individual and a service dog working together to navigate the world and it is natural to have questions about the relationship between the owner and the dog. Be considerate about the questions that you might ask such as “How does the dog help you?” or “How was the dog trained?” instead of intrusive questions such as “Why do you need a dog?” or “Why can’t I bring my dog into the store?”

- **Things to avoid:**
  - Resist the urge to feed a service dog anything, even dog treats
  - Never attempt to control the dog either with commands or by taking physical control of the leash or collar unless asked to do so by the owner
  - Avoid challenging a person with a service dog about their access rights