

MILFORD-ORANGE Bulletin

Learning to communicate has its challenges

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By Bridget Albert
Editor

BETHANY – It's all about the dog!

John Zibluk absolutely agrees with that. He says with certainty that having Rex, a purebred Airedale terrier, (commonly referred to as the king of terriers), has dramatically changed his life.

John has Asperger's Syndrome. And it wasn't until a substitute teacher said something to his mother that John was diagnosed in fifth-grade.

Asperger's syndrome is an autism spectrum disorder that is characterized by significant difficulties in social interaction, along with restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior and interests.

John's mother, Patricia Zibluk, said John was not happy at school. He was frequently picked on. His friends did not want to be seen with him at school she said.

Patricia said she wanted John to have a best friend and remembered growing up with her Airedale terrier as her best friend.

"I always had an Airedale and thought they would be the perfect breed for John. They are a very forgiving breed," she explained of the rough and tumble canine.

Before Rex, John would have outbursts, become focused on one item and remain focused like that, (Not unlike an Airedale).

"The bond (between John and Rex) has become so strong," Patricia said.

Getting Rex and John to the level they are at has taken some work.

Patricia enlisted the expertise of Master Trainers Vicki and Richard Horowitz. They are Southern CT Bark Busters.

"This was a unique situation," Richard said. "We needed to work at John's pace."

"With Vicki's background in occupational therapy and working in the school system we had a good blend," Richard said.

Working with Bark Busters John has learned how to talk and communicate with Rex.

"I used to yell at my dog. They have taught me to take it (voice volume) down," John said. These days he talks to Rex in a low, calm voice.



Photos by Bridget Albert - John Zibluk and his very loyal companion Rex have a unique bond.

And John has adapted these training lessons to his everyday life.

While John still focuses, a symptom of Asperger's Syndrome, that focus is now Rex.

Rex too, had to learn some new manners.

Before Bark Busters, Rex was your typical rambunctious Airedale always ready for the next adventure, and always the first out the door.



Rex the wonder-dale hams it up for the camera.

Today, the obedient Rex lets everyone else go first, sits when told to and lives to be next to John. The two are inseparable.

And one other trick Rex has learned is how to open doors. The very smart Airedale learned this trick on his own. Opening doors is not a Bark Buster skill the Horowitz's said.

John now attends Common Ground School in New Haven and is pretty well adjusted these days at school.

He also regularly has friends over and they all have the opportunity to enjoy Rex.

John and Rex have been featured on Animal Planets Airedale Terrier 101 episode filmed in Kent at Planet Airedale, also known as New England Airedale Rescue.

John is also working to help others with his disease. Southern CT State University recently opened its Autism Center and John is his schools representative on its advisory board.

And Rex? He is also service dog. This gives him the unique ability to go with John to restaurants and stay in fancy hotels that don't usually allow pets. While he works hard for his owner he certainly does have The dog's life.

To learn more about Asperger's Syndrome go to <http://kidshealth.org/parent/medical/brain/asperger.html>. To learn more about Bark Busters go to <http://www.barkbusters.com/dog-training-milford-newhaven>. To learn more about Airedale terriers go to www.newenglandairedalerescue.org.

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