

RPODS Extends Support to Boy in New York

By Jean Palacios

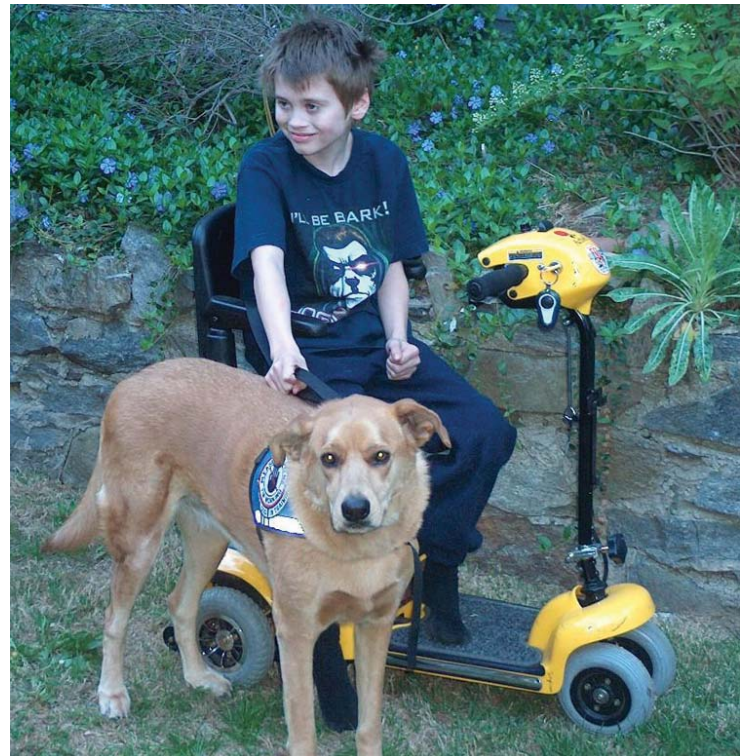
As many *WebRing* readers know, *WebRing* has been following the story of Raytheon Persons with DisAbilities (RPDA) member and Raytheon Parents of Dependents with Special Needs (RPODS) chairwoman Mary-Lisa Orth. Orth's twin sons, Benjamin and Alexander, were diagnosed with Friedreich's Ataxia disease in 1999 (see *WebRing* Volume 2, Issue 3, page 3). In 2004, Benjamin died from complications of scoliosis surgery.

After Benjamin's tragic death, his brother Alexander no longer had an interest in completing the training for Benjamin's service dog Shadow. Last April, Orth took Shadow to a family in Yonkers, New York, that she met in Boston at the annual

National Friedreich's Ataxia Conference in March. Orth had corresponded with the family for two years through the Friedreich's Ataxia parents' group list serve. The family includes a 9-year-old boy, Donovan, who also has Friedreich's Ataxia.

"When I sent out a notice to the parents' group looking for a home for a half-trained service dog, they responded immediately," Orth said. "They couldn't wait to get her. Donovan is so sweet and loving, and he and Shadow bonded immediately. It was just great to see. New York itself was a wonderful experience, but nothing compared to giving Shadow to such a wonderful family." Orth recently received an update on Donovan and Shadow from the family. "Donovan can now walk to the bathroom at night

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RPDA/Mary-Lisa Orth

Me and My Shadow – Donovan and his service dog Shadow.

without his parents help by holding Shadow's collar to steady himself," Orth said. "Shadow is also trained to go to the boy when he falls and stand steady while Donovan uses Shadow to pull himself from the floor and into a standing position."

In addition to the physical support Shadow provides, the emotional effect is far more rewarding, the

family told Orth. Shadow's presence in Donovan's life has helped him cope with the frustrations caused by his loss of mobility. Now, instead of meltdown tantrums, Donovan and Shadow curl up on the floor together until Donovan is feeling better. When Donovan is in public, instead of seeing a boy who has trouble walking, people simply see a boy and his dog walking together.

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