



## ***A Perfect Home for a Puppy A Boy from Minnesota and Golden Retriever Form an Instant Bond***

*Article by Cathy Free*

Eleven golden retrievers were born in one litter on Barb and Russ Felt's Minnesota farm. One stood out from the rest – a sleepy 12 ounce pup who was missing her right paw. The Felts named the pup Marvel and they had an idea for a perfect home for her. "We decided to place her with someone who also had a limb difference," said Barb. "Our vision was that she'd be a perfect companion for just the right child." The Felts posted a video about the litter on Facebook, including a message about the three legged pup they wanted to put up for adoption.

An occupational therapist saw the post and reached out to the Felts. She explained she worked with a boy named Paxton who had a right leg limb difference and she suggested the two families meet. Paxton was born prematurely and while he was in the neonatal intensive care unit, he developed an infection in his right femur that caused his leg to grow slowly. When Paxton turned four his right foot was amputated and he was fitted with a prosthetic foot.

The Williamses, live in Waconia, MN with their three children, Evelyn, 8, Paxton, 7 and Dawson, 1. They contacted the Felts who told them all about the pup with similar challenges to Paxton's. The Williamses were instantly intrigued and the following weekend they made the one hour drive to the Felts' farm to meet Marvel.

"We were hanging out in the living room and when they brought Marvel in, the kids immediately started rolling around on the floor with her. It was love at first sight. You could see the special bond Paxton formed with Marvel," said Blaine Williams. "As soon as Paxton sat down, Marvel was all over him, licking his face." Marvel, now 11 weeks old, will also be fitted with a prosthesis when she turns 8 months.

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## **Technology Corner BEAM Sensory Floor at Cobb Lekotek**

The "toy of the month" featured in this newsletter's technology corner is BEAM. Lisa Nevitt, the Cobb Satellite manager, first learned about BEAM's projected sensory floor through a Facebook ad. Upon receiving a grant through The Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta's Extra Wish Program, we knew exactly how to spend the funds.



The BEAM Sensory Floor has been an innovative addition to the Cobb Sensory Room. It's a perfect solution for any child regardless of their physical disabilities. Children can crawl, lie down or move their extremities to interact and play a game. A child, unable to move, can roll a ball on the floor to initiate the fun. BEAM is a projector and computer system installed into the ceiling. Sensors detect motion and project images on the floor. The system includes a number of games. For example, when playing the piano game, motion over the large piano keys projected onto the floor causes the keys to change colors while musical notes are played. BEAM is in synch with Lekotek's mission to facilitate learning through play. The floor surface is large enough for parents and siblings to also get in on the fun.

## Community Events



In September, we held our annual picnic at McDaniel Farm Park. The following weekend, partnering with The Freedom Waters Foundation, fifty families enjoyed a boating experience at Lake Lanier. Boat owners took individual Lekotek families out on the lake for a 2 hour excursion, followed by a barbecue and live music. In the fall, we conducted our annual Pumpkin Patch Hayride and Annual Zoo Day.



We'd like to thank the Atlanta Zoo for donating 150 tickets and thank The Freedom Waters Foundation for an incredible event that will become an annual favorite. These photos are from the Pumpkin Patch, Freedom Waters Day at Lake Lanier, Zoo Day and our Halloween Party. Dallas Crum, the owner of AMS Vans, is pictured with his children at the Halloween Party.



During the past 20 months, Lekotek has not "missed a beat" due to COVID. Throughout the pandemic we've maintained close contact with our families. Lekotek immediately pivoted from in-person sessions to zooming and out-door toy exchanges. We increased parent support group meetings, sibshops, music, computer club and pals with monthly zoom sessions for each. We transformed our annual Halloween and Holiday parties into parades. By doing so, staff were able to socially distance as families enjoyed activities from their cars.



We'd like to thank Dallas for providing a great venue for both the Halloween and Holiday Parades.

## Meet Catherine

Our 5-year-old daughter, Catherine, was born with cerebral palsy. She has developmental delays, is nonverbal and nonambulatory. After surviving 13 difficult weeks in the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit), Lekotek became a vital part of our lives. In her early years, Catherine's medical complexity required that she remain at home and Lekotek met her needs with home visits. I looked forward to these visits as much as Catherine. Our leader was always generous with her time and showing us the bells and whistles of Lekotek's unique adapted toy inventory. With just the press of a button, Catherine was able to play music or take a battery adapted toy puppy for a walk.

During COVID, our Lekotek leader, Jamie, arranged toy exchanges on our front porch. These toys were instrumental in stimulating Catherine during the isolating days of the pandemic. Catherine reached a point where I deemed her stable enough to enjoy the beautiful new Lekotek center. This was an exhilarating milestone for Catherine. One milestone leads to another and it wasn't long before I signed Catherine up for Lekotek's Summer Technology Camp. She thrived within camp's optimal environment of personal interactions with campers, the ever encouraging Lekotek staff and innovative technology. She earned the camp award of "Eye Gaze Queen" and in this photo she is using her eyes to direct the cursor. A camera attached to the monitor tracks Catherine's pupils and just by looking she is able to create an ensemble of music and colorful squares.



Due to her medical needs, cognitive and sensory delays, Catherine is a challenging child - even for professionals in this field. Yet, Lekotek absolutely refuses to give up on Catherine; every Lekotek leader we've worked with is relentless, passionate and dedicated. Our family is beyond grateful for Lekotek's encouragement and unwavering support.

Lekotalk is a regular publication of Lekotek of Georgia, Inc. | 1901 Montreal Road, Suite 126, Atlanta, GA 30084 | 404.633.3430 | [www.lekotekga.org](http://www.lekotekga.org) | [info@lekotekga.org](mailto:info@lekotekga.org)

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