

2024 Shining Star Ambassador

By CCA Shining Star Committee

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Every year, the Collie Club of America selects the Shining Star Ambassador from entries submitted by Collie owners throughout the world. The awards program is open to any Collie that works in any of five categories: service dog, therapy dog, library dog, search and rescue dog, and protector dog. A protector dog has done any exceptionally good deed for his family or the community.

All the Shining Star applicants should be proud of all their accomplishments with their Collies. This year we awarded Special Medallions to the category winners. All applicants meeting the Shining Star criteria receive a frame-worthy certificate.

The Collie/human team that is selected as the Shining Star Ambassador team is the representative of all the Shining Star nominees.

The Collie Club of America takes great pleasure in introducing the Shining Star Ambassador Team for 2024:

Bill and Lois Hall and K9 Calder.

Calder was bred by Leslie and Don Jeszewski of Highcroft Collies.

CCA Members Bill and Lois Hall have been doing therapy work with their dogs for forty years. For the past twenty years, the Halls have also performed search and rescue with their dogs. Calder is their third Collie and the second involved in search and rescue for the local Sheriff's Office.

Bill and Lois Hall have served as Reserve Deputies and Search and Rescue K-9 Handlers for the Sheriff's Office in Iowa and now in Georgia.

The benchmark for Calder's life is based on the Calder clan motto of "Be Mindful" which he learned from his Scottish godparents. He put this philosophy into practice with his first community program on K-9 Search and Rescue when he was four months old. In 2019, Bill and Lois Hall gave a K-9 Search and Rescue presentation to the Nighthawks, a Military Explorer Unit with the Iowa National Guard. The Iowa National Guard Unit members were so impressed that they made Calder an Honorary Private.

Calder presently works with the Gilmer County, Georgia, Sheriff, Fire & Emergency Management Service, focusing on Search and Rescue and Crisis Response.

If there is one word that describes Calder, it is versatile. His range of training and accomplishments form the diverse foundation for his community service.

Calder completed the AKC STAR Puppy Class and all levels of the AKC Canine Good Citizen program which provided a strong foundation for his certification with the Alliance of Therapy Dogs and R.E.A.D (Reading Education Assistance Dogs). He underwent additional training and became a certified Crisis Response Therapy Dog with Gilmer County, Georgia, Emergency Management. Calder also earned his AKC Therapy Dog Distinguished title.

Calder received instruction on Human Remains Detection from a retired Border Patrol agent. Calder trained in search, rescue & recovery skills based on Emergency K-9 Operations Search and Rescue (EKOSAR) and the North American Police Work Dog Association (NAPWDA) standards focusing on air scent, area search, building search, article recovery, and human remains detection.

Calder has earned over 100 titles ranging from obedience to scent work, agility, parkour, rally, herding, farm dog, stunt work, acting, search and rescue, tricks, and fitness.

Calder's therapy dog work includes visits to seniors, assisted living, memory care, hospice, crisis shelters, youth homes, hospitals, libraries, scouts, veterans, 4-H, and community outreach events.

Since Bill Hall is a bugler with multiple Honor Guard Units, including two Sheriff Office Units, Calder attends many Memorials for veterans and law enforcement personnel. Calder also attends special services such as those held nightly at "The Traveling Wall." Because of Calder's presence, veterans will often recount heroic actions of the Military Working Dogs in their units.

Traditional Therapy Dog visits are enriched by Calder's skills as a Trick Dog Masters Champion. Visits include seasonal props, games, puzzles, and tricks that encourage others to suggest tricks and take part in the action.

Calder regularly visits libraries helping children with their reading skills. Calder has not only been a one-on-one reading partner at the libraries, but also performs tricks based on the story-time themes or letters of the alphabet. He demonstrates his own skills by reading and performing tricks listed on bilingual flash cards. Calder's first reading partner narrated his submission for the AKC Elite Performer Trick title.

A unique side of Calder's work is fitness. He earned his Fitness Champion title and was the first dog of any breed to earn the AKC Fitness Gold Medal. He holds over 15 fitness titles, many of the skills were honed while working with residents during his Therapy Dog visits. Currently he helps Assisted Living Activity Directors with fitness classes in order to encourage seniors to participate and remain active.

Calder became a US National Park Program Bark Ranger which is a perfect complement for promoting fitness and educating children about stewardship of the land.

But Crisis Response remains the touchstone of Calder's service. After a major storm knocked out electricity for over a week, Calder visited with out-of-state linemen. During the Covid pandemic, he visited with essential workers and first responders. Calder was called out to support the family of a hiker missing on the Appalachian Trail and then spent time with the first responders who helped locate the deceased man. Calder was also on scene of a disaster simulation to comfort a young teen who had volunteered but became too stressed by the realism of the exercise.

Calder is also paying it forward by providing educational events through the AKC Ambassador Program, as well as his involvement in the Dog Aging Project, and the Colorado State University Veterinary Hospital, K9 Heroes Fund. Since both Bill and Lois Hall are Tester/Observers for the Alliance of Therapy Dogs, Calder assists with the handling phase of testing for the applicant Therapy Dog teams. During the observed visits, Calder demonstrates activities, and models skills necessary for a successful therapy dog.

ABOUT CALDER'S BREEDERS

Leslie and Don Jeszewski have been longtime breeders of rough Collies spanning a time frame of over 40 years. Located on 26 secluded wooded acres, just west of downtown Minneapolis, Minnesota, they have a small kennel with self-imposed limits to the number of Collies they keep. Their Collies bear the well-known prefix of "Highcroft," and they have had many notable achievements with their family of dogs over many years. Besides breeding to the Collie standard in pursuit of excellence, health and outgoing temperaments have been long standing virtues in their breeding program. They have been four-time recipients of the prestigious Collie Club of America Presidential Award for Breeder of the Year, and received a lifetime achievement award for AKC Breeder of the Year/Herding Group.

The "Highcroft" folks have been able to produce "Collies that can do it all." Not only have they produced CCA National show winners, but they have also had the All-Time Top-Winning Owner-Handled Collie in the history of the breed in Group and Best in Show wins. Collies from Leslie and Don owned by other dedicated fanciers have achieved top titles in performance events as well. CH Highcroft Bourne Ultimatum, for example, owned by Judy and Frank Belluomini, was the first all-breed Best In Show Collie to have achieved a Tracking Dog Excellent Award. Other Highcroft Collies have excelled in obedience High in Trials, Rally, Agility, Herding, Fast Cat, and Trick Dog, just to name a few other venues. Additionally, champions they've retired have gone on to become Certified Therapy and Mobility Dogs, extending their careers by helping humanity.

Now Bill and Lois Hall's Shining Star Award Recipient - Calder exemplifies what a Collie really CAN DO!

Congratulations to Bill and Lois Hall, Calder's owners and trainers extraordinaire!

The Shining Star Committee has awarded Medallions to four Shining Star category winners.

Our Library Dog Medallion winner is Jim McCleary with Caulin from Sylvester, Georgia.

Our Therapy Dog Medallion winner is Ted Slupik with Rosebud from Naperville, Illinois.

Our Protector Dog Medallion winner is Toni Bailey with Dave from Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

Our Service Dog Medallion winner is Kaitlin Moore with Levi from Santa Fe, Texas.

Over the next year, the Shining Star Committee plans to enhance outreach activities by again staffing a table at Sunnybank with the Committee's professional permanent display poster board. The display board contains photos of our Shining Star Ambassador and our Medallion winners; our Shining Star category certificates are displayed along with the medallions.

We will make the display poster board and brochures available for Meet the Breeds programs across the USA. The Committee maintains two permanent display poster boards, along with carrying cases, donated by a Collie-loving benefactor.

We believe that the CCA Shining Star Awards program enhances the reputation of our beautiful and versatile Collie breed and confirms the value of purebred dogs. We all feel privileged to work on this program for the Collie Club of America.