

VANCOUVER ISLAND COMPASSION DOGS

Service dog teams graduate

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Qualicum Beach's Vancouver Island Compassion Dogs has graduated the country's first seven teams of veterans and service dogs specially trained for post traumatic stress.

"It's funny, we're getting national attention but most people in Qualicum Beach, where we started, don't know what we're doing," said Barb Ashmead, president and founder of the non-profit VICD.

"This is the only PTSD service dog training program in Canada," she said.

She said there are a number of good service dog training organizations in the country, including their mentor group B.C. Guide Dogs, but those programs just train the dogs and hand them over to people.

VICD trains the dog and owner together over a minimum year long, intensive program which focuses on developing a bond between the pair.

She said the work itself is key, forcing them to get out for walks and giving people who are used to intense training, something to focus on.

"They're required to work with their dog a minimum five times a day for two or three minutes at first, and walk their dog three or four times a day," Ashmead said. "We're helping them integrate back into civilian life, a dog helps give them a reason to get up in the morning."

The program, which has two more teams



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY LEGION BRANCH 76

The QB Legion and provincial foundation donated to VICD, which trains service dogs and veterans with PTSD. Back row, from left: Don Taylor, Branch 76 President; Barbara Ashmead, VICD; Jim Diack, Legion Foundation Treasurer. Front: Veterans Maria Bolton & Hunter, Blair Meadows & Farrah and Simon Rossignol & Leah.

about to graduate and several others in training, just received a couple big donations to help them continue their work, Ashmead said.

The B.C./Yukon Legion Foundation recently donated \$60,000 and the local Qualicum Beach Branch 76 contributed another \$1,000 from branch funds.