

# The Picayune Item

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## Relationship between this man and his dog is perhaps a little bit more special

*By Jeremy Pittari, Item Staff Writer*

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PICAYUNE — A Harrison County man and his dog have formed a relationship that not only provides then man with companionship, but also assistance when he needs it.

At times Davis Hawn suffers from long standing physical ailments stemming from a previous accident, during those times his trusty dog Booster is there to help out.

Hawn said he initially gave Booster to a friend as a present, but that friendship would later end when he stole Hawn's truck. Hawn recovered the truck from a junk yard in Hammond, La., with the dog still inside and close to death. At first Hawn said he wasn't ready to be a dog owner, but after some time passed, and Booster had to be nursed back to health more than once, he became attached.

It was not until Hawn suffered a leg injury from a camper falling on it that he decided to teach Booster how to assist him in his daily activities in 2004 and 2005. Hawn taught Booster how to bring him water from the refrigerator, items from his truck, answer the door, turn on lights and when needed pull him in a wheel chair.

Booster, a six year-old Labrador Retriever, and Hawn were in Picayune this week while Hawn was waiting to undergo an operation to correct an acid reflux and ulcer disorder Hawn suffers from. Hawn said the staff at Highland Community hospital have been gracious enough to allow Booster to stay in his room during his recovery stay. Hawn said he does not feel he could go through with the procedure had Booster not been allowed to stay with him in the hospital.

Booster, who earned his name after attempting to steal or "boost" a toy from a pet supply store in Gulfport, is now a valuable asset at Hawn's household when needed. While Hawn is mobile most of the time there are times when he suffers from ankle swelling that keeps him from getting around, that is where Booster comes in.

"People think you have to look disabled to be disabled," Hawn said.

Not only does Booster help Hawn with his physical ailments, but his psychological ailments as well. Hawn said he suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Booster helps keep him level when attacks set in. At one point Hawn set out to distance himself from social interaction, but each time he took Booster for a walk Booster would drag him to areas where people were.

After teaching Booster to help him around the house Hawn said he decided to learn more about how dogs and human interact by attending the Assistance Dog Institute in Santa Rosa, Calif., in 2008. The school is now known as the Bergin University of Canine Studies and is an accredited institution capable of issuing Associate, Bachelor or Master's degrees in Science, Hawn said.

In his schooling Hawn has learned that Service Dogs, or dogs that help people with any number of physical or mental ailments, such as Booster can help more than just the deaf and blind. Hawn said Service Dogs can be taught to alert family members or caretakers when a person is suffering from a diabetes attack, seizure and can help soldiers who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

For people such as himself who at times suffer with social anxiety a Service Dog can help reintroduce people to social interactions, Hawn said.

When Hawn completes his Master's degree training at Bergin University by completing a project, he hopes to use that project to help others. He said he has two ideas in mind for his project, one involves him helping South Mississippi women in abusive relationships by showing them the companionship of a well trained dog. He hopes that new companionship will show the women that they do not need to be with someone who abuses them, Hawn said.

“(By) giving them a new best friend who loves them unconditionally,” Hawn said.

His other idea involves traveling to a foreign country and training a dog without a home to be a Service Dog for a disabled person.

“I want the dog to bring two countries together,” Hawn said.

Not only can trained dogs sniff out illegal substances, locate bed bugs or provide companionship, they can also help children diagnosed with Autism, Hawn said. Service Dogs can help protect children with Autism by tethering the child and dog together allowing the Service Dog to make sure the child does not walk into traffic, stays calm during times of stress and keeps the child from leaving the home without the parent's knowledge.

“Some people just don't realize the value of the dog in society,” Hawn said.