

CLT Welcomes Puppies Headed for Careers as Assistance Dogs

As the plane turned off and the doors opened at Wilson Air Center July 15 afternoon, little barks filled the air along with the sound of sniffing and the pitter patter of happy puppy feet.

Though tiny, the 14 Labrador and Golden Retriever cross puppies have begun their journey toward becoming future assistance dogs. Volunteer puppy raisers were onsite to retrieve the puppies.

“They’ll teach them about 30 basic commands. An important job that they also do is socialize them,” said Martha Johnson, a public relations and marketing coordinator for Canine Companions For Independence. “In the future, the dogs will help with such things as turning lights on and off, closing doors, picking up items and other needs.”

The puppy raisers will get the puppies used to being around people and teach them sit, stay and other commands.

Canine Companions is the nation’s leading provider of free assistance dogs to people with disabilities. The organization typically relies on commercial airlines to transport the puppies to volunteer puppy raisers across the country. When COVID-19 hit, this became more difficult and private pilots stepped in to help.

Four pilots help them now. Volunteers Jim Stewart, a California business man and his wife Vikki, flew the puppies from California to Wilson Air Center on Wednesday.

The volunteer puppy raisers will work with the puppies about a year and a half. After that, the puppies will be returned to Canine Companions where they will receive more training before going to a person with disabilities when they’re around 2 years old.

Johnson said many of the puppies are going to North and South Carolina cities. Some are also going to Atlanta. Nationally the organization has around 1,200 volunteer puppy raisers, about 200 of which can be found in the southeast.

To learn more about Canine Companions visit <https://www.cci.org/>.

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