

Ginger: From Shelter to Therapy Dog

Contributed

In 2020, Nanette Zeller and her husband decided that they were finally ready for another dog. At Caring Hearts for Canines, they found Ginger, an active but gentle Lab mix who completely stole their hearts. Ginger's natural inclination to soothe others became apparent through years of training sessions, and at 6 years old, Ginger found her calling as a therapy dog at FirstHealth.

After being certified, approved and onboarded through FirstHealth's volunteer services, Ginger began working with the Reid Center for Well-Being (CWB), a program at FirstHealth that offers services to employees to support their mental, emotional, physical and financial well-being. The CWB also partners with Caring Hearts for Canines to bring shelter dogs to FirstHealth campuses for fostering and adoption consideration, further underscoring the beauty of Ginger's journey from a shelter dog there to one of our beloved therapy dogs.

Zeller knew Ginger was meant to join their family when she stepped forward and laid her head on her chest. According to her, this instinct is what makes her such a great therapy dog.

"She has this natural urge to just lean into people and give love," Zeller said. "Essentially, that's all her job is. The staff enjoy it and she does too."

Zeller and Ginger have been visiting staff and patients at least once a month since July, traveling to FirstHealth locations in Sanford, Hoke and Pinehurst. They

have visited clinics, emergency departments and the cancer center in the past six months. Ginger's job is simple but impactful — offer herself for pats, lay on people and show affection.

According to Zeller, she is very intuitive about what people need.

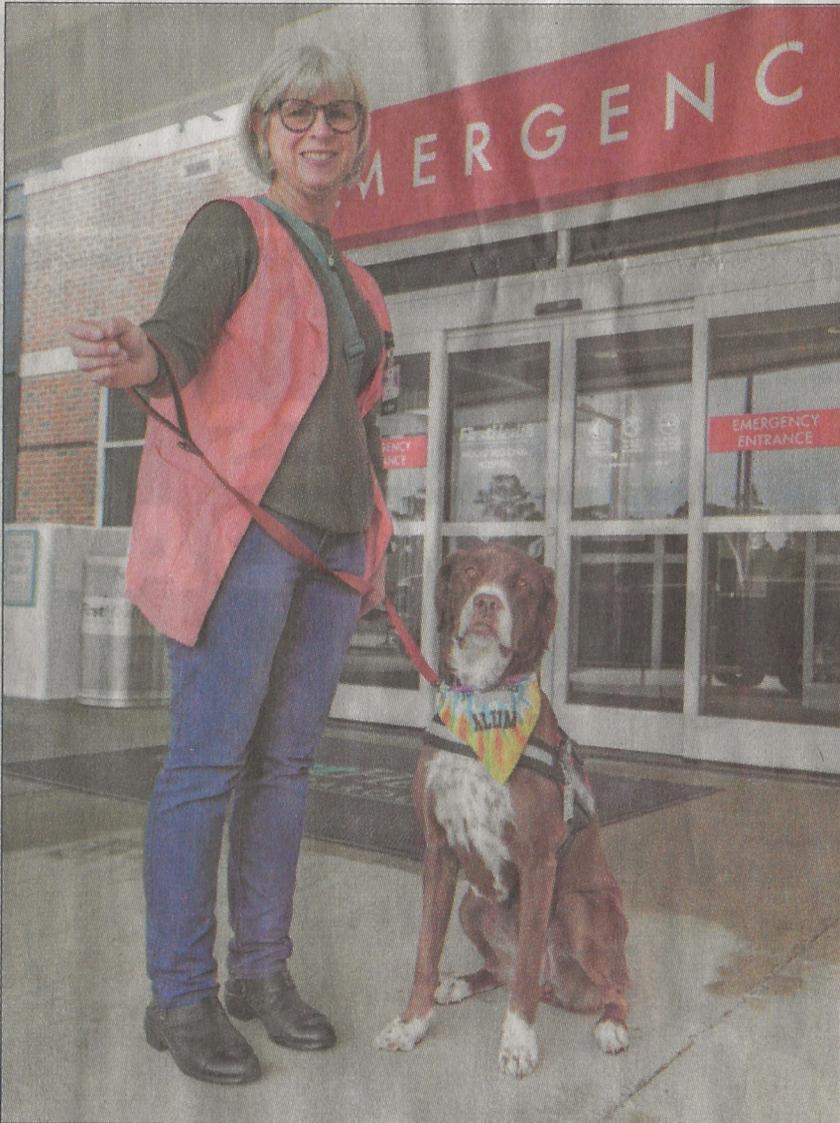
"She can just sense how someone is feeling and what they may be needing in the moment," she said. "It makes my heart feel good to share her with people."

While Ginger is on standby for visits, often being called out to places as needed, FirstHealth has therapy dogs that also work on a specific schedule and in specific units.

The therapy dogs are so good at their job that they have become little celebrities on campus. "It's at the point where people recognize her when we're walking around FirstHealth or ask for her card," Zeller said. "It's a really great feeling."

Therapy dog services and FirstHealth's partnership with Caring Hearts for Canines are just two of the Reid Center for Well-Being's offerings that have become invaluable to our employees. With a complex and demanding work environment, FirstHealth is committed to providing these resources for those who care for our community.

Established in 2023, the FirstHealth Reid Center for Well-Being (CWB) is an innovative benefit for all employees sponsored by the Foundation of FirstHealth. For more information about the process of volunteering with your therapy dog, contact Volunteer Services at (910) 715-1266.



CONTRIBUTED

Ginger with her owner Nanette Zeller

THE PILOT 3/8/24