

Four-legged grad helps out a family

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At his [Canine Companions for Independence](#) graduation ceremony, former Tulane “student” Kipper the service dog meets his new family, at left, 8-year-old Jamey Carrington and his father, Kenny. Turning over Kipper's leash to the Carringtons is Tulane senior and Kipper's puppy raiser, Adam Kline (in the blue T-shirt). At the podium is Shelly Dickinson, one of the instructors for Kipper's advanced training class. (Photo by Diesta Gundacker)

Kipper began his education on the Tulane University uptown campus. He recently finished graduate school and has his first job. It's already a tail-wagging success.

He's a four-legged alumnus who trotted around campus wearing his service dog insignia, following puppy raiser Adam Kline, the founder and president of the Tulane University Service Dog Training and Education Program (TUSTEP).

Kline, a Tulane senior, trained Kipper in some 31 commands for 16 months before sending his dog to professional training in Florida with Canine Companions for Independence. Less than half of dogs complete the professional training, but Kipper made the grade.

Earlier this fall at a graduation ceremony, Kline proudly handed over Kipper's leash to Kenneth and Rachael Carrington, who had been waiting for a service dog for their 8-year-old son Jamey, a third-grader who has spinal muscular atrophy and uses a wheelchair.

The Carringtons say that Kipper's presence already has been life-changing.

"For Jamey, Kipper has meant companionship, most of all," Rachael Carrington said. "He really is a special dog; he's one of us now."

Her husband trained at Canine Companions with Jamey to learn commands for Kipper, who went right to work at the Carrington home in rural Meansville, Georgia, opening doors for Jamey when he's in his wheelchair. And Kenneth Carrington taught Kipper a new skill. Jamey can't move his legs, but with the command, "Kipper, legs!", the dog "will nose the legs back up into a more comfortable position," Rachael Carrington said. "It's just amazing."

Kline said he "couldn't be happier" with Kipper's placement. "Kipper's gone a long way to helping Jamie be able to socialize and have more independence."

Meanwhile, TUSTEP continues to [train puppies](#) for Canine Companions. Students are training 10 dogs now; three will leave their trainers ? senior Leslie Howton, junior Darian Hummel and graduate student Michelle Kreutzberg ? for professional training in the spring. When Kline graduates, [TUSTEP](#) continues under new leadership.

"It's awesome to have younger students who are really excited about the future of TUSTEP," Kline said, "and who are going to take on something a lot bigger."

Read more about TUSTEP in [Tulane magazine](#).