

Ty Ankrom's Here's What I Think ...

A year ago March, Angie Overholt opened her home to an eight-week-old Golden retriever and Sonny has become a near-constant companion.



Because Sonny is being trained to be a service companion, he must have good manners, tolerate grooming, not be predatory and can't be on the furniture.

"Only 50 percent of the dogs make it as a service dog," Angie said.

But Sonny isn't her dog in the traditional sense. Angie is training Sonny to be a service companion through Canine Companions Inc.

Angie, the pre-school coordinator for Pickaway County schools, has some experience with dog rescue and clicker training and has friends who have a service dog for their daughter who has cerebral palsy.

Thus, the idea of raising and training a dog to be a service companion appealed to her.

"I thought, 'What the heck. Let's apply.' "

While she's had Sonny for almost a year, Angie had to wait five months before she was paired with Sonny. There is a lengthy application process that culminates in a two-week training class for the applicant.

Angie Overholt brought Sonny to an ESC staff meeting this fall to talk about her effort to raise and train him as a companion service animal.

Sonny has been accompanying Angie as she visits preschoolers during her job, which gives him the opportunity to learn to mind Angie's commands and behave among strangers and large groups of people.

"I like for him to interact," Angie said of Sonny trips to schools and weekend trips with her wherever she goes. "He's very solid. He's never been spooked."

Angie said there is a significant time commitment to the training process.



Feb. 26, 2016

"It's kind of like having a toddler," she said. "But it's very worthwhile."

Angie created a Facebook page (search for Sonny II) on which she's been posting photos of Sonny and his adventures.

For Angie, that will come to an end in August, when Sonny goes to a Canine Companions facility for four months to be evaluated.

The house won't be dog-free, however, as Angie has Buddy, 13, a beagle, and 7-year-old Connor, a Golden retriever mix.

And maybe she'll train another dog someday.

"I wouldn't rule it out," she said.

Ty Ankrom is the superintendent of the Pickaway County Educational Service Center. He can be reached at ty.ankrom@pickawayesc.org.