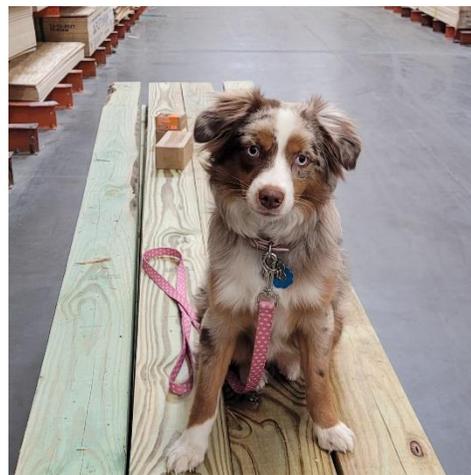


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## Miniature Australian Shepherd helps trauma victims in Cobb



Miranda Lambert, a 25-pound Miniature Australian Shepherd, is making history as the first service K9 to be trained for PTSD and anxiety in the restoration industry, according to her owners. Across Cobb and Fulton county Miranda uses skills from her intensive training as well as her compassionate nature to assist victim service company Georgia Clean. She works each day with primary handler and owner Gordy Powell and co-handler Rachel Strawder.

“Her purpose is to go out and de-stress a family, not only from the event, but also should law enforcement still need to question the family,” said Powell. “She just de-stresses them to the point where questions can be asked — questions in relationship to the homicide or suicide.”

Miranda wasn't always destined to be a service K9; Powell initially adopted her as a family pet. The idea came to him at a conference in June 2021 when someone shared that their business culture included having dogs in the office.

“I thought, ‘Well, how unique is that?’” said Powell. “I had already set up the adoption for Miranda... so, I went back and told my wife, ‘You know, if Miranda checks out the right marks maybe this is something we introduce into our industry.’”

Miranda has been enrolled in advanced obedience training at Elite Dog Training in Atlanta since she was a puppy. Here, Powell discovered that she was a perfect fit for the job with her “inquisitiveness, energy and caring passion.” He noted that this breed commonly possesses these traits despite also being notoriously stubborn.

“It's like breaking a horse,” he added jovially.

As her training has progressed, her skill set focus has honed in on how to alert to signals of PTSD and anxiety.

A vetting process occurs before Miranda goes out to a home or to a family to ensure her safety. Powell said some of the questions that need to be answered beforehand include: Does this person like animals or dogs? Are there other animals on the premises? Is it a hoarding condition where Miranda could be introduced to harm?

Each situation is uniquely different, so the way Miranda is processed to families or individuals varies. Voice and hand signal demands direct her on what actions to take.

“She’s gonna have a command where you hold your hand down below and you say engage, so now she knows that she has to go to work,” described Powell. “If she’s on the floor, she’s going to alert to anxiety by taking both in front paws and bouncing off your knee. If she’s on your lap, she’ll take her head and she will caress underneath your chin and your neck.”

While Miranda takes her job very seriously, she doesn’t live by the phrase ‘all work and no play.’ She spends about 90% of her day as a “regular dog,” according to Powell. Her favorite thing to do is ride the carts at Home Depot or Lowe’s and meet people.

“It’s always about socializing,” said Powell. “When we meet people you know, some folks are like, ‘I know she’s a service dog. Can I touch her? I know not to touch her.’ I go, ‘Well, she’s kind of a reverse service dog. You know, the more interaction she gets, the better it is for somebody else down the road.’ So when she meets somebody, she hands out her training card, and she interacts with them.”

Miranda’s country singer name follows the theme of Powell’s other Australian Shepherds: Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard and Shania Twain. She responds to fitting buzz words such as, “Let’s go to the tour bus,” to get in the truck, and, “Go backstage,” to go to the bathroom.

The real Miranda Lambert even knows about her, and Powell hopes for a future meet up between the two.

“Miranda and her mother have a foundation called MuttNation. It helps dogs in shelters, and so she helps promote that as well,” he said.

Restoration companies around the globe are becoming increasingly inspired by Miranda and have adopted similar programs since hearing about her, according to Powell.

Currently, Miranda is still undergoing training. She will receive a diploma by the end of the summer to complete her current training program before starting another.

“It’s (training) an ongoing process...There might be another spin or technique that we learn through another handler that we can use and incorporate into Miranda for when she’s out in the field,” said Powell.

