

## Service Dogs for America agency to visit Valley City

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Head trainer Michelle "Mitch" Doyle works with two of the service dogs: Gunnie, the blonde dog at left, and Snowflake, the black dog at right, at the facility at Jud, N.D. (Submitted photo)

By Jean Schlegel  
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Service Dogs for America from Jud, N.D., will give a presentation about its mission at the Sheyenne Valley Friends of Animals meeting in Valley City on Monday, Jan. 26.

The non-profit agency, formerly Great Plains Assistance Dogs Foundation, was founded in 1989 for the purpose of providing disabled individuals with dogs in order to aid independent living. SDA is registered with the State of North Dakota. Its mission is to assist individuals living with disabilities to gain greater

independence and opportunity by use of trained working assistance dogs.

Michelle "Mitch" Doyle, head trainer at Jud, said, "Training with positive reinforcement and fun, the end result is a happy, well-behaved Service Animal. We train Service Animals for greater independence of an individual living with disabilities, one person, one dog, at a time."

SDA's vision is: A society where disabled persons are empowered to fully participate in social, educational and occupational opportunities.

People often ask what the people at SDA in Jud do.

Doyle can answer that. She said, "We train and place service dogs, emergency medical alert-response/seizure alert-response dogs, therapeutic companions, and specialty dogs with people who need them. Our clients come from diverse backgrounds and situations, and include individuals with mobility issues, auditory challenges, medical problems, and a combination of the above.

"Our services also include placing dogs with elder care, hospice, or rehabilitation facilities."

She added, "The focus of our program is human service; the beneficiaries of our program are people."

The cost to this program is more than \$20,000 per assistance dog placement. The cost to the individual receiving the dog is established on a sliding scale system, based on the individual's ability to pay. Each and every student must financially contribute to the program to some extent. Remaining costs are offset through the generosity of charitable gifts to this program.

SDA is a project of the District 5NE Lions Clubs. Some prominent gift givers are regional Lions Clubs, Phil Hansen (retired professional football player), Dakota Medical Foundation and Animal Charities of America, plus many caring individuals.

Members, animal lovers, or anyone, are welcome to the SVFA's meeting Monday at 7 p.m. in the Municipal Courtroom, Valley City Police Department, to learn more about the service dogs.

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