

## RDS EDITORIAL

My Pet (Trained)  
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A recent article in the Santa Rosa Press Democrat was titled “Fake Service Dogs Anger Owners of Trained Pets”.

(<http://www.pressdemocrat.com/article/20130807/articles/130809625>)

As the proud partner of a “Trained Pet” named Presto, please ignore the head banging. How many times have I snarled, “He is *not* a PET,” to an airline reservationist? I was dismayed by this news. That is to say, I was dismayed that the issue *made* the news. I was not looking forward to another day of explaining myself as I went about my daily activities with my Pet (Trained) by my side.

Most of us who use Guide Dogs or Service Dogs have experienced access challenges of one sort or another. I have had cab drivers holler, “No mutts lady!” as they screech away from the curb when I attempt to hop in. I have had bus drivers refuse to move their buses and customer service people refuse to serve me. Mothers drag their small children towards Presto on a regular basis, cooing, “Looook, doggie, “ and offering little hands as a succulent treat that fortunately Presto ignores (unless they’ve been eating bacon).

Usually (with the possible exception of cab drivers), an explanation that my dog is a “Service Dog” will get the bus moving. But recently, publicity about “fake service dogs” have brought out the worst in people. For example, a couple of weeks ago I boarded the campus shuttle with Presto only to be stopped at the door by the driver. “You got papers for that dog?” she growled. I pointed to his vest and gave my Service Dog spheel. “I need papers,” said the driver again. I explained about my disability. I told the driver about the work Presto does for me. I explained about the ADA (I was on a roll) but the driver would not give up. She did finally move the bus, but she publically humiliated me during the entire ride by continuing to assert my illegitimacy in a loud voice and arranging over the radio for security to meet me upon my disembarkment. I am sure I was the most exciting thing that had happened to her all month. There had recently been a news story about “fake service dogs” in our local paper. And I paid for it dearly.

After I spotted the “Trained Pets” story I became curious. Just how many people out there are actually trying to scam us into believing their mutts are the genuine article? A search for “fake service dogs” led to little data but some interesting commentary.

According to a blog called “Life with Dogs”:

“The New York Post reported that many New Yorkers have been using fake ‘service dog’ tags on their pets so they can take them wherever they want. Dog owners in New York have been purchasing fake tags, vests, patches and certificates on the internet. These New Yorkers put these tags on their dogs so they can take them into restaurants, grocery stores, coffee shops, clubs and other

business.” (<http://www.lifewithdogs.tv/2013/08/people-using-fake-service-dog-tags/>)

What is the matter with these people? Why on earth would anyone want to take their dog to the grocery store? It's like taking a child to the grocery store, distractions around every corner. And a club?? What dog would not go absolutely insane inside a club with blaring music and stupid dancing drunk people? Cafe's, coffee shops and restaurants, I guess if you're a Francophile. But honestly, if Presto did not perform a functional service for me, I would leave him at home asleep on my couch, chewing on one of my daughter's Barbie shoes, where he belongs.

Apparently, some people are so into their dogs that they will break the law to go everywhere with them. Service Dogs Central has an article on “Spotting Fake Certification” with a long list of online sites where you can purchase phony Service Dog certification and equipment. They also feature “scary” verbiage from these sites including (very scary) tidbits such as:

"If your dog exhibits occasional nipping, Service Dog Certification of America recommends muzzling." (<http://servicedogcentral.org/content/node/509>)

Today a CBS news story about fake service dogs made the national news:

“It's an easy law to break, and dog cheats do. By strapping a vest or backpack that says ‘service animal’ to their pet, anyone can go in stores and restaurants where other dogs are banned, creating growing problems for the disabled community and business owners and leading to calls for better identifying the real deal.”([http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-204\\_162-57607109/illegal-fake-service-dogs-pose-dangers-to-many/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-204_162-57607109/illegal-fake-service-dogs-pose-dangers-to-many/))

As I stood in line at Starbucks with Presto, waiting to order my afternoon-slump latte, not one but *two* little old ladies gave me the stink eye. “Cheater,” their looks said. I gave them the stink eye right back, but it did bother me. I have the vest, the leash, the ID tag and the ID card, all proclaiming that Presto is a genuine Service Dog. He even *looks* like a service dog (Golden Retriever with impeccable manners). What do I need to do to “prove it” to these people? Just because Lazy Larry doesn't want to leave his dog at home so he doesn't have to worry about his carpet shouldn't mean that someone with a disability has to submit a blood test to use public transportation with their Service Dog. How about prosecuting people who sell fake ID cards? How about “Three Piddles and You're Out”?