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DART goes to the dogs on Saturday, March 1

DART train becomes special canine classroom

A DART train will become a mobile classroom for a dozen dogs learning to serve people with disabilities. The dogs - golden retrievers, Labrador retrievers and golden/Labrador crosses - will be accompanied by volunteer "puppy raisers" from Canine Companions for Independence and DART Paratransit Travel Trainers.

"The purpose of this outing is to get the dogs used to the sights, sounds and commotion of getting on and off trains," said Cindy Pitney, a puppy raiser and spokesperson for Canine Companions for Independence. "We're getting them used to what will become their life's work."

The dogs, ages four to 16 months, and their raisers will ride from Bush Turnpike Station to the West End where they will join their trainers at lunch. Pitney said the dogs will practice lying quietly under train seats and restaurant tables. "Basically, their job is to ignore everything else," she said.

Following their work with the volunteers on basic obedience, commands and socialization, the dogs will go to California for final training. Once trained, they will assist people with physical disabilities other than blindness, increasing their independence and security while offering loving companionship. Because of the vital service they perform, these dogs are allowed access to all public places, including trains and buses.