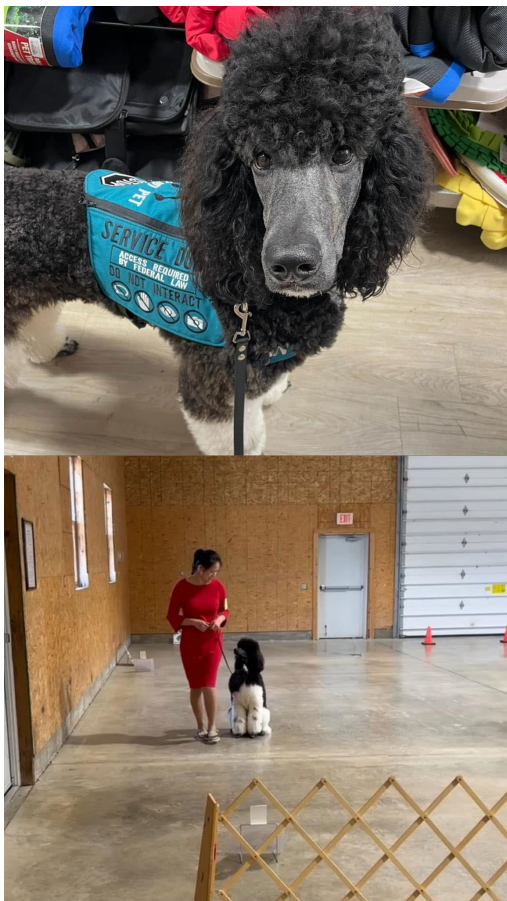


# United Poodle Association

## Service Dogs, Part 2: Enrichment

By Rebekah Undersander

Service dogs are trained to assist individuals with disabilities and perform critical tasks that improve their handlers' quality of life. As a service dog trainer and handler, I am often asked if they are ever off duty. The work they do is demanding and intense, necessitating careful consideration of their well-being beyond their official duties. Ensuring that service dogs live well-rounded and enriched lives can enhance their effectiveness while working.



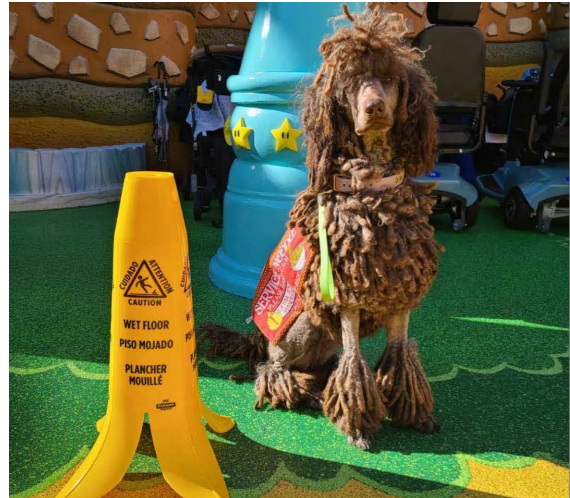
## The Need for Enrichment

Service dogs are often seen as tireless helpers, performing tasks ranging from guiding visually impaired individuals to alerting those with medical conditions. Just like any other working professional, service dogs need periods of relaxation and activities that allow them to decompress and engage in behaviors that bring them joy.

Enrichment activities are crucial for maintaining a service dog's mental and physical health. These activities can include playtime, training games, social interactions, and participation in dog sports. Engaging in such activities not only alleviates boredom but also fosters a deeper sense of team for both handlers and dog. By balancing their work with recreational activities, service dogs can remain motivated and enthusiastic about their tasks.

## The Rise of Sports and Activities

Recently, there's been a growing trend among service dog teams to involve their dogs in various sports and activities. Canine sports such as agility, obedience trials, and even dock diving provide excellent outlets for physical exercise and mental stimulation. These activities can help service dogs release pent-up energy and drive, keep them in better working shape, and increase their bond with their handler. Training and competing together in these activities promotes teamwork and mutual trust. This strengthened bond translates into a more harmonious working relationship, where the dog is more likely to be motivated and responsive—similar to the saying “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.”



It is essential that handlers meet their dog’s needs. Some of these needs are based on genetics for what the breed was originally bred to do. For example, because poodles were bred to hunt, they often have prey drive and a desire to sniff. Finding an outlet for these behaviors can help improve the dog’s impulse control. This could be through hunting with their dog or through sports such as barn hunt and scentwork. Other sniffy enrichment options can be something as simple as sniffy walks or find-it games at home. There are endless options for enrichment and activities should be based on the dog in front of you! Remember, a well-balanced dog is a happy dog, and fulfilling their natural instincts will lead to a stronger bond between you and your canine companion.