Beth Deal of Southwest and her dog, Willie, graduate from the Canine Crusaders Ministry at St. Luke's U

W hile many dogs enjoy chasing squirrels, going for walks o

Founded by Winter Garden resident Valerie Almos in 2000, St. Luke's United Methodist Church at Wind

At least once a month, owners and their four-legged do-gooders visit local nursing homes, shut-ins, hom

“Canine Crusaders has allowed us the unique opportunity of getting a chance to visit with the folks in va

Open to the entire community, the program welcomes almost every dog breed.

“Some dogs are quicker than others, but it doesn’t matter as long as they have two bright eyes, a cold n

Participants are required to give a one-year commitment and must be at least 10 years old. However, ch

“Dogs are so intuitive,” Valerie said. “They just know when something is not right. Even the young dogs

Valerie, who has more than 35 years of experience breeding and showing dogs around the U.S., was in

“After I started feeling better, I wanted to do something to give back,” she said. “From experience, I know

Valerie and her team have crafted a highly specialized program that utilizes both obedience and agility t

“Everyone is getting so much out of it,” said Valerie, who admitted it brings tears to her eyes when she h

“My favorite visit is with one elderly lady at the nursing home,” said Andrea Monaco of Ocoee, who visits

Current medical research confirms that contact with animals can play a significant role in reducing anxie

Owners receive tremendous benefits from the training, as well.

The 2012 graduates of the Canine Crusaders Ministry at St. Luke's United Methodist Church at Windern

"By the time you have finished the classes, you will all have a closer bond with your dog than you ever th

For more information about Canine Crusaders Ministry, visit www.stlukes.org/ministries/caregiving on the Web.