



Live entertainment nightly
(Oh, and there are bands too.)

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owner," said Paws volunteer Gail Montgomery. "They can pick up things that small."

Pongo can push buttons on an elevator, turn lights on and off, pick up medicine bottles in his mouth and walk up stairs one at a time. He also knows basic commands and the accompanying hand signals.

"I want him to be perfect for someone else," Elson said. "I spend more time with him than I do with my own dogs."

Elson also has two 100-pound Labradors and three cats. They're used to sharing dad's affection. For more than nine years, Elson fostered cats and dogs for the Humane Society. He would house pets for days and sometimes months. Some of them were sick. Some were too young to be adopted. Some just needed training.

He still occasionally volunteers for the Humane Society, but Elson's new cause is Paws. He heard about the program at a Cobo Hall dog show, where the group had an informational booth and dogs demonstrating their talents.

Elson was impressed. He asked if he could help. He hopes others will, too.

While the group has 120 foster homes across the country, Paws needs about 150 more.

If you'd like to become a foster parent, Elson said you need time, patience and some extra cash, if possible.

"You just have to work with them," Elson said. "Don't lose control. You'll work with these dogs more than most people work with their kids."

When it comes time for Pongo to leave, Elson will ask for another puppy.

"My house is already trashed, so another dog won't hurt it," Elson joked.

According to Paws numbers, handicapped Americans are underserved when it comes to service dogs. A Michigan Department of Labor study found that 13 percent of people with disabilities would like an assistance dog, meaning that more than six million people with disabilities

STAFF PHOTOS BY BOB BREYER

Training: Pongo and trainer Jess Elson walk through the CVS drug store in Farmington.

want a dog trained to assist them with daily living activities.

Paws trains about 40 percent of all service, hearing, seizure and guide companion teams in the country.

"There's such a need," Elson said. "My mom taught me to give back to my community. I'm not a wealthy man, but this is something I can give."

Paws foster parents must fulfill simple but important obligations. Most importantly, they must show the dog love and attention. Additionally, they must pay for food and veterinary bills, take the dogs to obedience training and socialize them by

escorting them to public places
and events.

"As they grow older, they become aware of their surroundings, but they won't shy away," Montgomery said.

Paws, formerly called Ears for the Deaf, originated in 1979. The group has placed more than 500 service dogs across the United States. The donor-supported program receives no state, federal or local funds.

If you're interested in fostering a puppy, call Paws at 1-800-253-7297 or view their Web site at <http://www.pawscause.org/pawshome.htm>.

