



### THE BEST OF FRIENDS

#### KELSI AND JACKSON

Seventh grader Kelsi lives in Martin's Ferry, Ohio with her grandparents, Donna and Roger. Like many thirteen-year-old girls, she is involved with cheerleading, having fun with friends, reading, playing on her iPod, swimming, and horseback riding. Unlike most girls her age, Kelsi lives with Cerebral Palsy.

In the winter of 2011, Kelsi's grandmother sought after a service dog from *Assistance Dogs for Achieving Independence*. She knew how beneficial an assistance dog could be for Kelsi. Donna wrote in to ADAL, explaining what a dog could do for her granddaughter. "A dog would provide so many opportunities for her and make her more independent. To have a dog who can open doors or pick items up off the floor would be a blessing."



Enter Jackson, a two-year-old black lab. Kelsi received Jackson at ADAL's Summer Graduation in 2014. Kelsi worked very hard during Team Training to bond with Jackson and to learn all of his commands, and her hard work definitely paid off. When asked what Jackson does for her, Kelsi responded, "Jackson helps me to be more independent. I don't have to depend on other people as much. He is my friend and helps me gain confidence."

Kelsi was not the only one who was excited to bring Jackson home. She had an abundance of friends in Martin's Ferry anxiously awaiting Jackson's arrival so they could all meet her new service dog. Donna says that "Kelsi is involved with everything she possibly can be. She is not your average thirteen-year-old; she has the compassion, understanding, and determination to stay ahead and keep working. She has a disability, but she does not let it hold her back."

Every day when Kelsi goes to school, Jackson goes to his place in her bedroom, sitting and waiting for her to come back. When it is about time for Kelsi to arrive home, Jackson waits patiently by the front door until she makes it inside. Jackson will be allowed to attend school with Kelsi after six months once it has been ensured that their bond is strong. Luckily, Kelsi and Jackson already have an unbreakable bond that is visible to everyone. Jackson is trained to help Kelsi retrieve her cell phone, get help in case of an emergency, and open the refrigerator door. Kelsi noted, "It is like me not having a wheelchair. People will not be looking down at me; they will be looking at my dog!"

