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The magazine of
the Mizzou Alumni Association

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Around the Columns

Therapeutic pooch

Three years ago, on the first day Corey Hale spent with his golden retriever, Alma (then a puppy), they drove through a Colorado snowstorm on the 15-hour trip to Columbia. Hale was starting a master's program in speech pathology at Mizzou. He figured the trip would be tough with a pup, but they made it without incident. "I knew then that we were a good match," says Hale, who graduated in May 2009.

Alma was Hale's pick of the litter to become not only a pet but also a therapy dog. "She was laid back, seemed easy to train, and she appeared to be a very trusting animal," he says. "I thought that with the therapy dog training, she could join me in a work setting once I graduated."

But first, Alma had to prepare for a graduation of her own. Hale trained her thoroughly for certification by Therapy Dogs International (TDI). The group tests and registers dogs and handlers that visit hospitals and nursing homes. "Some people laugh






Corey Hale graduated in May 2009. With his therapy dog Alma, he's ready for a career in rehabilitation. Photo by Rob Hill

now that Alma even goes to the bathroom on command. But that will make therapy visits a great deal easier for both of us,” he says. In 2007, Alma passed TDI’s tests of temperament and obedience to become one of more than 18,000 dogs the organization has registered since 1976.

Hale completed two internships for his degree, including one at Missouri Rehabilitation Center in Mount Vernon, Mo., where he worked with patients who have traumatic brain injuries. Alma got in on the act, too. “It was great to see patients’ reactions to a dog in the rehab unit of the hospital. I observed patients who were often difficult to engage in therapy light up at the sight of Alma and reach out to her,” Hale says.

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Published by MIZZOU magazine, 109 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, MO 65211 | Phone: 573-882-5916 |
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Last updated: Feb. 15, 2013