

Leeds students name service pup in training 'Lucky Tim'

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Kathryn Skelton, Sun Journal

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LEEDS — After coming up with a long list of contenders that included Fluffy, Unicorn, Gronk, Vladimir and Buttercup, Leeds Central School students named the new therapy dog-in-training Lucky Tim.

He may also be extra lucky: Trainer Christy Gardner said specialists have reached out since she introduced the pup to the school on Monday and there's now a chance he may not lose his right leg.

"There's been an outpouring of support for him," she said Friday.

Lucky Tim has consultations planned with two specialists next week, one of whom "thinks they can maybe make him a custom brace for the leg and avoid amputation," Gardner said. "I'm definitely willing to see what they can do for him. Fingers crossed it goes well."

The 9-week-old yellow Lab was born with missing wrist bones and a radius that wasn't attached at both ends. He was identified early as having potential as a therapy dog and the Leeds school was immediately interested.

This week, students submitted dozens of potential names for the pup. The top two were Lucky and Tiny Tim, Principal Danielle Harris said.

Tiny Tim is the name Gardner had informally given him since he had a bad leg and was born around Christmas. The name refers to a character in Charles Dickens' novel "A Christmas Carol."

"'Lucky' won with 65 percent of the vote, but lots of people felt very strongly about keeping his name 'Tiny Tim,' so his name is going to be 'Lucky Tim,'" Harris said.

She told students the decision during an assembly Friday.

Plans call for Lucky Tim to start training at the school once a week for a year, once he recovers from surgery. He has a hernia that also has to be addressed.

School Administrative District 52 Superintendent Kimberly Brandt said she's open to considering whether the therapy dog can stay long-term but hasn't had the time to fully research the idea yet.

In other dog-related news for Leeds, the school is up to \$2,000 in its efforts to raise funds to connect a veteran with a service dog through the Maine-based nonprofit K9s on The Front Line.

Harris said a Florida woman reached out with \$300 after hearing about the students' effort.

VetriScience Laboratories in Vermont also offered a \$1,000 match if the students reached \$1,000.

Teacher Jennifer McLure-Groover, whose students were initially interested in learning more about service animals, which triggered the fundraiser, said Friday that she spoke with someone from K9s on The Front Line. She found out that if the organization finds a year-old dog from a shelter with the right disposition, it's able to train and match the animal with a veteran for \$3,000.

The school is hoping to raise that full total and K9s on The Front Line is looking among veterans in need for one in Maine who would be willing to let the students be part of the journey of being paired with a new service animal, perhaps with photos or visits.

"It's kind of like seeing something that started as just a conversation with kids turning into something really fruitful and amazing that's going to help somebody," said McLure-Groover.

"She said they have had a situation where another veteran they had worked with actually went to the school and was reading books with the kids," she said. "It blossomed into something above and beyond just having the dog to reconnect that veteran with the joy of living, it also recreated new and different relationships in ways they didn't expect."

She said she's excited about the possibilities for her students.



A young service dog in training has been named Lucky Tim by Leeds Central School students. In this photo, he frolics in the snow before Monday afternoon's assembly. (Sun Journal photo by Russ Dillingham)



Leeds Community School Principal Danielle Harris holds Tiny Tim during Monday afternoon's assembly. Moxie, a service dog owned by Christy Gardner, looks on. (Sun Journal photo by Russ Dillingham)

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