

PineStraw

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The Art & Soul of the Sandhills

A Dog's Eye View

Meet Devon
and Bob,
Two of our
2009
Everyday
Heroes

Psychics & Snow Babes ★ Art of the Amazon ★ Pinehurst's Dapper Derr



Seeing a New World

Just over a year ago, Bob Baillie went into the hospital for bypass surgery and woke up, unimaginably, in complete darkness. As an unintended result of the procedure, he was permanently blind. “It’s the kind of thing — please pardon the pun — you never see coming. It turns your whole life inside out in ways you cannot imagine.” After months of recovery and bouts of depression — “I call them my black days,” he quips — Bob and his wife, Lainie, set off for the Mira Foundation in Montreal, an innovative French-Canadian organization that provides intensively trained guide dogs free of charge to the visually handicapped. Mira is where Bob met Devon, a 3-year-old, 100-pound Bernese Mountain Dog, somewhat of a poster dog for empowering the blind. “The first time we met,” Bob recalls with a laugh, “he literally knocked me over. We were great pals from that moment on.” These days, the pair are a familiar sight around Southern Pines, walking to Bob’s favorite haunts, The

Java Bean, Ianos and the post office. “I just tell Devon where to go, and we’re there,” Bob notes. Moreover, Bob, a businessman who with his wife generously supports various Sandhills charities and organizations, recently began liquidating some of his assets and kicked off fundraising to help create the first Mira Foundation facility outside of his native Canada. “There are only 13 places in the United States that specialize in guide-dog training and none in North Carolina,” he explains. “There are 22,000 blind people in this state, 688 children alone — and most will never have access to a free guide dog that could change their lives. We hope to change that.” Over the next year, Bob ambitiously hopes to have at least three trained dogs ready for new owners, preferably young people. “It’s my vision, if you will, and I’m totally dedicated to making it happen,” he says. “You never know what you can do until something like this happens. Devon has literally shown me a new world.”