

small dogs,

# BIG BATTLE

## Kennesaw woman fights for the rights of guide-dogs-in-training – and wins

By Amanda Crissup  
*Cobb Neighbors Staff Writer*

**KENNESAW** — According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, a service dog can go anywhere their handler needs to go.

Restaurants, grocery stores and schools – if it's part of a blind person's daily routine, then their seeing eye dog is right there, getting the job done.

But Berry College junior 19-year-old Michelle Cox wanted to know why the law was different for puppies training to be service dogs. Restaurant owners balked when she wanted to bring Aston, a black lab in training, to join the family for dinner.

"We have to get our dogs used to anything a blind person might encounter," Miss Cox said. "You would-

n't take a regular dog shopping with you, but these dogs are going to have to do that."

A volunteer puppy raiser with Southeastern Guide Dogs for four years, the Kennesaw resident set out to do something about it. So last week, she helped change the law.

"I just really wanted to do something to give back to somebody. Not many people work with training service dogs," Miss Cox said.

With the help of her mother, Ellen Cox, a property control technician for Cobb County Schools, the Coxes worked with Rep. Tim Bearden (R-Villa Rica) to pass House Bill 366, which allows service dogs in training the same access to public places as their adult canine counterparts.

"It was very exciting, but we couldn't have done it without several disability groups pulling together," Mrs. Cox said.

Other states have laws permitting service puppy raisers access to public places and Mrs. Cox said Bearden's bill, co-sponsored by Rep. Steve "Thunder" Tumlin (R-Marietta) and Rep. John Meadows (R-Calhoun), was based on Tennessee's law.

"I just felt it was a very good bill to help get these dogs ready for training," Bearden said.

Now 11-week-old McIntosh, the Coxes' current yellow lab puppy-in-training, can go to restaurants to learn the proper way to respond to so many overwhelming smells and adjust quickly to new environments.

"When you're baking a cake a dog smells the sugar, eggs, milk, vanilla ... everything that goes into the cake," Mrs. Cox said. "Our job is we're taking them out of the canine world and putting them in the human world," Mrs. Cox said.

As puppy raisers, McIntosh will stay with the Coxes until she's about 2 years old. Then she'll go onto more advanced training at Southeastern's headquarters in Palmetto, Fla.

The elementary-school equivalent of obedience school pays off too, said Deidri Cumbie, a Powder Springs resident and seeing eye dog user.

"The more these puppies are taken into environments, the better behaved they are as we as handlers handle them," Mrs. Cumbie said.

