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Local News - Monday, September 13, 2004

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## Heroic pooch helps save elderly neighbor Oakley alerted owner to need

By **Chris Lassiter/staff**

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STAUNTON -- Valerie Locklear knew her black labradoodle, Oakley, was a great companion.

On Sunday morning, she learned he was a rescue dog, too.

The poodle-Labrador retriever mix alerted his owner to an elderly neighbor who needed medical attention.

"It made me realize how smart he is," Locklear, the proud dog owner, said. "He knows her, and normally he doesn't bark at her."

Oakley woke Locklear up at 7 a.m. Sunday morning. The normally mild-mannered canine was barking uncontrollably because Locklear's neighbor, who is in her 90s, had fallen down on the 400 block of Albemarle Avenue.

The elderly neighbor broke her arm and is being held at Augusta Medical Center. Later Sunday afternoon, the elderly woman's son dropped by to personally thank Locklear and her puppy.

At first, Locklear was worried the dog was barking because an intruder had entered her house. She followed Oakley out to see the cause of the commotion, and noticed a motorist outside who had stopped to help her elderly neighbor. Locklear never got the other woman's full name, just that her first name was "Crystal."

Together, Locklear and the motorist were able to get the neighbor medical help.



Chris Lassiter/News Leader

**Oakley, a black labradoodle, alerted his owner Valerie Locklear that an elderly neighbor had fallen.**

Oakley is Locklear's first dog. A special education teacher at Thomas McSwain Elementary, Locklear suffers from asthma. She had to get a first-generation mix of a poodle and a Labrador retriever because labradoodles don't shed. The dogs cost between \$900 and \$1,500.

To Locklear, it's a worthy investment.

"He's very affectionate," Locklear said of the 9-month-old puppy, who is enrolled in puppy school. "He's the sweetest, most caring dog."

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