

Grayling grad earns top spot in pet competition

by **Dan Sanderson**
Staff Writer

A Plainwell pet owner, who has a background working with dogs in Grayling, has earned her spot in the national spotlight.

Toula, a 3-year-old border collie owned by Christine Mahaney, has been recognized as "America's Most Talented Pet" in the national "Petco Stars" competition. Toula beat out more than 600 dogs and received the most online votes in the competition.

Mahaney adopted Toula from a boarder collie rescue operation in Kalamazoo when she was just 5-weeks old.

The two bonded immediately and started with obedience classes, but Toula was eager to learn and become more of a part of Mahaney's daily routine.

"Border collies need a job to do," Mahaney said. "She got bored with the sit-stay routine at the classes."

Toula and Mahaney compete in agility competitions, where dogs are required to go through a number of obstacles.

Toula can complete 21 various tricks and tasks. When Mahaney comes home, Toula greets her with her slippers. When she sneezes, the dog will get a

Kleenex. Toula can open the refrigerator, get a soda out of a cooler and flush the toilet. When Mahaney sits on the couch, Toula will fetch a pillow. If she says burr, Toula will get her a blanket.

Toula was among a dozen finalists selected for the "America's Most Talented Pet" competition. Mahaney likened the competition to being on "American Idol."

"I was thrilled that people could see what Toula could do and I am proud to show people what you can do with a dog, especially a rescue dog," Mahaney said. "I'm a big believer that you get out of a dog what you put into a dog."

Mahaney said she was able to get Toula to do tasks that she sees her do daily through positive reinforcement.

"We make the training fun for both of us," she said.

Mahaney and Toula will fly to Los Angeles this week for winning the competition. Toula will be featured in national Petco ads. Mahaney and Toula will also meet with agents with the possibility of being featured in movies, commercials



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