**April 2013** - Zephyr began work with Brian, a 20 year old boy with a severe brain trauma from an automobile accident. When we first met Brian, he was curled up in a fetal position on his bed. Paige (lead therapist at Jim Thorpe Rehabilitation Hospital) told me he was completely unresponsive to any stimuli but they wanted Zephyr to visit his grandmother who had taken up a vigil in Brian's room. We went into the room and visited with Brian's grandmother. She absolutely loved Zephyr and Zephyr was very sweet to her. Then I asked Zephyr to get up on a chair near Brian. I asked her to "kiss" Brian. Zephyr stretched her neck out and planted a big wet kiss on Brian's chin. Paige was standing in the doorway watching and was shocked to see Brian pull back away from Zephyr. I learned later that that was the first response to ANY stimuli that Brian had shown. The next week, we went in to visit Brian again. He seemed largely unresponsive, but I again asked Zephyr to climb up on the chair to visit Brian. I encouraged him to touch Zephyr and finally, he reached up and grabbed hold of Zephyr's vest. He pulled Zephyr tightly to him and could not release her. Brian had Zephyr in a death grip and I was afraid she might panic, so I quietly reached around and released the buckles on her vest, allowing her to retreat with the vest left in Brian's hand. Zephyr was amazingly calm and gentle throughout the whole ordeal and never once tried to pull away even though Brian had her pulled in a very un-natural position. She just looked up at me with those eyes that said, "Uh... a little help here, please?" Again, getting any response from Brian was a very positive thing. **Week three** and Brian seemed a little more alert and less stiff. I talked to him constantly during the visit and while he didn't make eye contact with me, he did watch Zephyr. After the previous week, I was cautious to not get into a grabbing kind of situation! We also visited with Brian's grandmother who is a very sweet, caring lady. On **Week 4,** I learned that Brian had had his first visit to the gym this week. The therapists are passively moving Brian's stiff limbs to prevent his muscles from becoming too atrophied. Brian's schedule is full of different therapies so he never goes very long without stimulation of some kind. Brian was drowsy from his medication so while he napped we visited with his grandmother. We tried to include Brian in the conversation but he was pretty sleepy. Zephyr was also tired from some intensive work with another patient, so she took the opportunity to take a snooze, too. **Week 5** found Brian even more responsive. I was told he had begun to make sounds during the week, so we worked on that further by encouraging him to "talk" to Zephyr. I also placed the soft pink pig toy under Brian's hand. He reflexively gripped it tightly which produced a loud squeal that really got him focused on it. I explained to him that to make it squeal he must open his hand to let the air into it. He closely studied the pink pig for the rest of the visit, his brain re-learning how to command his hand to open. At the end of the visit, I asked Brian if he would shake my hand before we left. He looked at me with a puzzled look and moved his hand toward me - A tiny, minute, quivering move. I very gently picked up his hand and squeezed it. **Week six:** Brian was up in a wheel chair when we arrived. He had begun to make significant progress during the previous week. Zephyr seemed very happy to see him and Brian was able to almost reach out to touch her. Zephyr made sure he did not fail by nuzzling his hand. We worked with the speech therapy cards, with Brian attempting to give Zephyr commands. I reinforced the commands with hand signals to ensure Zephyr did as Brian asked. The whole time I talked to Brian, asking him about his coonhounds at home. Which his favorite one was, what their names were, did he hunt with them, which was the best hunter, etc........ I put a treat in Brian's hand and Zephyr gently nuzzled it out, helping him to open his clenched hand. At the end of the visit, I asked if Brian would shake my hand. He lifted his hand up to shake mine. He still had some difficulty in releasing, but with coaching he did fine. **Week seven:** Brian continued to improve. He was now forming words and could obviously understand the conversation. He even tried to talk to me about his dogs. As with every other visit, Brian's grandmother was there supporting, encouraging and celebrating every small victory. We worked with the speech/memory cards and I was surprised by how much Brian could remember. He can now say Zephyr's name and knows what breed she is. With effort, I can understand his speech which allows us to carry on a limited conversation. I placed the pink pig in his hand and asked him to throw it for Zephyr. He understood but could not quite command his arm to throw it. Instead it just rolled down his leg at which point Zephyr enthusiastically kicked it across the room and squeaked it wildly. She brought it back and I then changed to the tennis ball. Brian tried again, and again Zephyr enhanced his throws with kick and rolls! We said good bye with the hand shake. First I asked him to shake Zephyr's "hand". He very, very slowly leaned forward and moved his hand out. Then he said, "Zephyr, shake." Zephyr shook his hand. Then I put my hand out. Slowly, he raised back up, reached out and shook my hand. **Week eight:** Brian was able to throw the ball this week! All aspects of his physical and mental state seemed to be much improved. He was alert and bright eyed and recognized us with a smile when we walked in. Paige said that he was able to start standing and was using the bathroom and eating regular food this week. His speech is much more understandable but still significantly impaired. Brian played with Zephyr and the tennis ball for awhile and then we changed over to the large kick ball that requires two hands to throw. With some difficulty, he learned to use both arms at the same time. The therapist then had him kick the ball out the door and Zephyr would retrieve it. Finally, we did speech therapy cards and Brian was able to communicate commands to Zephyr. Zephyr got a lot of treats today! At the end of the visit, we all shook hands! **Week nine:** Ryan was alert and waiting for us when we arrived. We carried on a fairly animated conversation about how he was going to get to go home soon. We worked on the speech/memory cards and Brian did quite well, missing only a couple of the harder questions. We worked on commands. His speech is still slow and garbled but understandable. His motor skills have vastly improved this week and Paige said they had him up walking with a walker this week. We played with almost every toy in the bag! At the end of our visit, I asked to shake his hand and he had no problems at all shaking my hand and releasing it normally. He even made good eye contact and smiled as he did it! **Week 10:** When we arrived, Brian was not in his room. His grandmother said he was out on a field trip with Paige to a nearby Mexican restaurant. We were only waiting a couple of minutes when they came in. Brian was still in his wheelchair but he stood up when he got to the room. He was smiling and even teased Paige a little! Brian will be going home tomorrow. He is excited and can hardly wait to see his dogs again! We worked on his speech, memory and commands. His memory is good but his speech still needs a lot of work. But what a HUGE improvement he has made over the time we have worked together. No more diapers. Eating regular food and even remembering what he had for lunch. (I can't even do that on many days!) He played with Zephyr, patted her and gave her treats. I gave him her brush and he brushed her as we talked about how to groom coonhounds. I asked if he would like to take a walk with Zephyr. Paige nodded her approval and I put Zephyr's leash on and handed it to Brian. I told him how to use the command to "heel" and off we went down the hallway. I did not even have to hold the tab on Zephyr's collar. Brian had complete control. We walked and chatted for at least 15 minutes. When we returned to the room, I told Brian we had to go see other patients, but did he know what we needed to do before we left? He immediately smiled and reached his hand out to shake my hand. Then he patted Zephyr on the head and said goodbye. I told Brian I would miss him and how proud I was of him. I told him to keep working hard to get better and to give his favorite coonhound, Blue, a big hug for me. I gave Brian's grandmother a hug and told her what an amazing woman she was to stick with Brian through the good and bad. I got a little choked up so I wished them well and left to work with other patients. I will never forget Brian.