

# Deaf cattle dog deals in education, inspiration

By Ed Lammon

When Windsor man Eric Melvin decided to take in a new pup just over four years ago, he was looking for a faithful four-legged companion. But when he brought home Angelyne, his Australian Cattle Dog (also known as a Blue Heeler), little did he know that he was also taking on a new purpose in life – that of an educator and, along with Angelyne, an inspiration.

At first, all seemed normal. Angelyne was a healthy puppy, full of energy. But as the two went through puppy obedience class together, Melvin began to notice that Angelyne was a special case.

"She was around 13 weeks old when I realized there was an issue. Our teacher suspected Angelyne may have a (hearing) problem due to her inability to focus on me and respond to voice commands, loud noises, and recall exercises," Melvin said.

At this point, Melvin faced a decision that might be tough for most – should he take on the formidable task of training a deaf dog, or should he return Angelyne to the breeder? But for Melvin, the decision was an easy one.

"By the time our vet confirmed that Angelyne is deaf, I was already bonding with her," Melvin said. "When I got Angelyne, I wanted a companion dog and an exercise partner. I was also thinking of getting her involved in agility competition. When I learned of Angelyne's deafness, I never even considered returning her to the breeder. ... I was told and read a lot about typical things that happen to deaf dogs, including euthanasia, foster homes, shelters, and a life of misunderstanding, abuse, and neglect. None of those realities agreed with who I am or my values."

"Somehow I had the ability from within to see the situation as a positive challenge, make the commitment, and keep go-



Photo by Heidi Muller, [www.heidimuller.net](http://www.heidimuller.net)

Windsor Australian Cattle Dog Angelyne, seen above and at right with owner/trainer

Eric Melvin, was born deaf. But, despite her handicap and through years of training, the pair now serve as an inspiration to those who see them perform at local schools and events.



Photo courtesy of Eric Melvin

ing. By keeping and training Angelyne, I did get a companion and exercise partner, but I also

got a great teacher and a dog with a purpose larger than both of us."

**Right:** Angelyne and Eric, with the help of a pair of young assistants, demonstrate one of her many talents at a local animal event.

**Bottom right:** As a puppy, Angelyne seemed like a normal dog. But as time passed, Eric learned that she was deaf.



Continuing with the puppy obedience class, Eric and Angelyne saw fast success. "When we finished puppy kindergarten class, we had progressed more in the remaining four weeks than I thought possible," Eric said. "We were awarded the most improved team at the end of the class. Once the basics of getting and keeping Angelyne's attention were routine, I felt confident we could do anything. I also had to start thinking like a dog to fully understand her motivations. I had to assume with confidence that I was the pack leader and she was one of the pack, and devise a non-verbal communication strategy that would exemplify that."

After the class was done, Eric and Angelyne pressed on. Eric began to learn American Sign Language (ASL), and adapted a few of the signs for Angelyne's commands. Other commands are variations on signals that Eric learned in the puppy obedience class, while still others are entirely unique signals that Eric developed on his own.

Fast-forward four years. After years of training with Eric, Angelyne now responds to over 40 different hand signals and non-verbal commands. Angelyne boasts a new nickname ("Angelyne the Amazing Deaf Cattle Dog"), a collection of incredible tricks, and the pair serve as educators and entertainers at area schools and events. Among their many accomplishments, Eric and Angelyne have won top honors in numerous Colorado talent competitions, have showcased their talents at a collection of area animal events and fund-raisers, and, perhaps most importantly, have inspired hundreds of Colorado kids by taking their presentation to state schools.

The pair have donated countless hours to local non-profit organizations, and have been called on by groups such as the Larimer Humane Society, the Humane Society of Weld County, the American Cancer Society, Relay for Life, Colorado Puppy Rescue, and more.



"My mission and work with Angelyne is to travel everywhere and anywhere I can to share with people, make them smile, and ... inspire them with our message," Eric said. "I would also like to start a national foundation that would provide education, resources, connections, opportunities, and recognition for special needs kids/adults and special needs animals for their amazing abilities and contributions to society."

Eric considers a December 2009 presentation at Golden's Rocky Mountain Deaf School, surely an inspiration to all of the students and teachers in attendance, to be among the pair's crowning achievements. But he's looking forward to much more inspirational work with Angelyne in the future. "I would not trade my experiences with Angelyne for anything," he said. "Everything we have done, every place we've gone, and everyone we've met has been more than worth it. The wonderful way people react to us and our message is why we do what we do, and that's why Angelyne and I are just getting started!"

To learn more about Angelyne and Eric, visit their Web site at [www.amazingangelyne.com](http://www.amazingangelyne.com).

# Pets and their People

## The pet

**Angelyne**, Australian Cattle Dog, born 10/31/05

## The owner

**Eric Melvin**, Windsor resident, owner of Soaring Hawk Creative

### What is the inspiration behind Angelyne's name?

Angelyne was named after the song "Angelyne" by one of my favorite bands, The Jayhawks.

### Do you also have nicknames for Angelyne? And if so, what are they?

What do call a deaf dog? Anything you want. They don't listen to us anyway. Sometimes I call her Kid, Dingo, or Crazy Dingo.

### What are Angelyne's favorite activities?

Angelyne loves playing ball, practicing for our routines, learning new commands, hiking, car rides, making people smile, and kissing children.

### What are Angelyne's most annoying habits? Most endearing habits?

Angelyne is HSHDHISA (high speed, high definition, hearing impaired and super active). I'm convinced she is obsessed with playing ball. Her focus on me and dedication to working, playing, and entertaining are her most endearing qualities.

### What's the single worst deed that Angelyne has ever committed?

Jumping on the counter and eating a whole bottle of baby aspirin when she was about a year old. She also ate two Gentle Leader training collars. I can't decide which is worse.

American comedian Robert Benchley is quoted as once saying, "A boy can learn a lot from a dog: obedience, loyalty, and the importance of turning around three times before lying down." What's



### the biggest lesson that you've learned from your dog?

Angelyne has taught me that everyone looks up to someone and has someone looking up to them no matter what. Angelyne has also taught me to appreciate what I have and remember that life's lessons and treasures aren't always delivered to us the way we would hope them to be.

### What's the biggest lesson that you hope that others can learn from Angelyne?

Anyone, anywhere, anytime with any circumstance can accomplish what they want if they can see it, believe it, and never give up. Also that every



person and animal deserves a second chance.