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HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
NEWS RELEASE



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 22, 2015

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**Six Dogs. One Mission. Six Weeks.**

**“Project 616” to graduate its first class of previous shelter dogs**

**GRAND RAPIDS** – The Kent County Animal Shelter has teamed up with Whiskers University, Whiskers Resort and Pet Spa and Vicky’s Pet Connection for a great new program to highlight the value of shelter dogs as companions and prepare them for a successful, life-long adoption. “Project 616” is a six-week long, residential training program at Whiskers University for dogs taken from the Kent County Animal Shelter, who are then eligible for adoption through Vicky’s Pet Connection. The mission of the program is to change public perceptions that dogs in rescue/shelter situations are unwanted because of behavioral or health issues, and to encourage the personal rewards of rescuing a dog.

The Kent County Animal Shelter received about 2600 stray or unwanted dogs last year. “Many people drop off their dogs because of behavioral issues, such as chewing household items, making ‘accidents’ inside the house, or excitability issues,” said Carly Luttmann, Kent County Animal Shelter Supervisor. “It’s heartbreaking. But a program like this can turn around those bad behaviors. We are fortunate to have the support and partnership with Vicky’s Pet Connection, Whiskers University/Resort and Spa.”

Whiskers University training is comprehensive and caring. “We all know that a well-behaved dog makes for a happier home, but how we train matters,” says Kristie Swan of Whiskers University. “Improper methods jeopardize progress and well-being. Training rooted in science while conducted with compassion and respect builds stronger relationships with greater opportunities for success and life-long placement.”

Success hinges on selecting the right families for adoptions. “Dogs in this program learn to correct their unwanted behaviors, and their new families are given guidance to better understand their dog and continue their progress,” says Shannon Reincke of Vicky’s Pet Connection. “‘Project 616’ offers us the opportunity to understand the dogs’ individual personalities, their strengths and weaknesses, and what type of family environment they will likely thrive in. When interviewing potential families, we take into consideration expectations, household dynamics, and willingness and availability to continue with training.”

One of the dogs is already being adopted: the five remaining dogs will be available through Vicky’s Pet Connection. More about Project 616 can be found at [www.project616.com](http://www.project616.com).

**MEDIA NOTE: You are invited to the Graduation Celebration, scheduled on Thursday, June 25, 2015 at 3:00 p.m. at Whiskers Resort and Spa, 2855 29<sup>th</sup> Street SE, Grand Rapids. The facility is located between Breton and East Beltline.**

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and three satellite clinics located in Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit [www.accesskent.com/health](http://www.accesskent.com/health).

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