

# Ventura County Star

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(Chuck Kirman / Star staff)

*Children play with Archie, a 165-pound Newfoundland therapy dog at Casa Pacifica in Camarillo. Archie had surgery on an injured leg and now needs a second operation, which will cost \$5,800.*

## Therapy dog is in need of some help of his own Casa Pacifica pooch Archie requires surgery

By Anna Chang-Yen

Three-year-old Precious hadn't stopped smiling since she spotted Archie. She giggled and made a face that said "yucky" as she wiped a glob of white, foamy "schnarf" from his mouth with a rag. On a lush green lawn at Casa Pacifica, Archie sat calmly, his wavy black locks rippling in the wind, while getting rambunctious hugs from Precious and other young children.

Archibald Razzmatazz provides much-needed smiles at the Casa Pacifica home for abused, neglected and emotionally disturbed children. It's just another day at the office for the 165-pound Newfoundland, who came to Casa Pacifica more than two years ago to be a therapy dog.

He lives with Vicky Murphy, director of operations and development for the nonprofit Casa Pacifica, but has made scores of friends while camping out in her office during the day. Children come by to read to Archie from a library of books about dogs, or just to pet or cuddle him.

In 2005, Casa Pacifica staff researched therapy dogs and found that Newfoundlands were rated among the best. The American Kennel Club describes the dogs as having a sweet disposition and being devoted companions.

At 9 weeks old, Archie already weighed 21 pounds when he arrived on a plane from Maryland to start his work at Casa Pacifica. In persuading her husband to sign off on bringing Archie home with her, Murphy said she asked, "Come on, how big can he get?" When Archie hauls his massive frame around Casa Pacifica's Camarillo campus, he might stop to pick up a game of catch with a small football tossed around by a group of admirers. "He's kind of everybody's dog here," said clinician Sean Schoneman.

Solidad, 13, whose last name and others are not being published to protect the children's identities, usually doesn't speak. But she drops by a few times a week to see Archie and talk to him. She tells him he's a good boy. "He's sweet and very calm," she said softly as she snuggled up to Archie on the floor, gently stroking his fur. "He's mellow, and he likes kids."

While Archie has been busy providing therapy, he now needs some special care for himself. He injured a back leg while roughhousing with Murphy's other dog, a Shitzu-poodle mix.

Archie underwent a \$5,800 surgery for the injury, which was comparable to an ACL injury in a human. Now he needs surgery again from the stress of shifting his weight to the other leg while he healed.

Casa Pacifica has no budget to care for Archie, whose purchase price and food, as well as the first surgery, have been paid for with donations.

Although he's in some pain and is slowed down by a hobble as he walks, Archie keeps plugging away at his work, which consists mostly of just being a mild-mannered dog.

In his time at Casa Pacifica, Archie has tagged along to help one child concentrate while taking tests at school. A teenage boy became an expert in caring for Archie and once described the dog as his only friend.

"He would throw out all these facts about dog care that I didn't even know," Schoneman said. The boy's self-confidence skyrocketed.

"He would just look forward to those moments when he would walk him and take care of him."

Children relate well to Archie because of his "unconditional positive regard for people," Schoneman said, adding that when a child is being disruptive, sometimes it's hard for adults to mask their frustration. "We can say the right thing with words, but it's harder to hide it with our actions."

Archie has had obedience training and earned the AKC's Canine Good Citizenship certificate. After his surgery, he will be trained as a water rescue dog in case of an emergency in Casa Pacifica's pool.

Archie's fans at Casa Pacifica are hoping to raise another \$5,800 for his next surgery, considering it a worthwhile investment for the children he helps.

"For some kids, it's hard for them to touch or be touched, but with Archie, they hug him and lay on him," Murphy said. "They say, He loves me so much. He makes them all feel incredibly loved."