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Maureen Maurer has developed new methods of communicating with service dogs. Read more about her and other inspiring Islanders in "Our Geniuses," page 44.

The Dog Whisperer

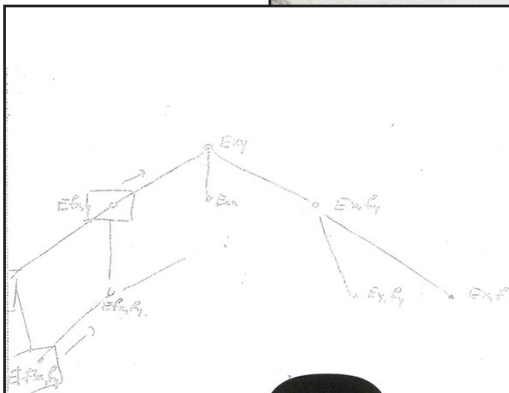
IN MAUREEN MAURER'S LINE OF WORK, SHE TAKES THE PHRASE, "Man's best friend" to a whole new level. In 2000, she launched her Maui-based nonprofit Hawai'i Canines for Independence, and, since then, she's trained and placed more than 40 service dogs with physically disabled people in the Islands. But wait, there's more.

In 2008, a man with cerebral palsy was in need of a service dog. The problem: The man could think normally, and had the use of his right hand, but he wasn't able to speak, making it impossible to communicate with a dog. Not so, thought Maurer. She developed a new type of communication in which the man used hand signals to tell the dog what to do. That same year, she figured out a way for people who are completely paralyzed, but have the ability to move their eyes, to communicate with dogs. "When dogs are bonded with partners they watch their faces, and research studies show that dogs will actually follow a person's gaze," she says. Maurer has now trained canines to do things like open a door or turn on a light just by seeing a person stare at an object.

Today, she's working on a project involving scent-detection, in which she's researching new ways that dogs can provide early detection of medical conditions, such as skin cancer. (FYI: A dog's sense of smell is 200,000 times stronger than a human's.)

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BY SHEILA SARHANGI // PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK ARBEIT