



BERGIN UNIVERSITY of **CANINE STUDIES**

Bonita M. (Bonnie) Bergin, Ed.D.
President and Chief Academic Officer

Bergin University of Canine Studies, Home of the Assistance Dog Institute

In 1975, Bonnie Bergin originated the concept of “service dogs,” dogs trained to help people with mobility limitations. She founded **Canine Companions for Independence (CCI)** in Santa Rosa, California, to be the provider of such dogs, expanding CCI to centers in New York, Ohio, Florida, and southern California.

Her research into dog personalities provided an objective, reliable method of placing service dogs with clients. She also identified key concepts in service dog selection: low arousal, low predation, and low initiative among other traits, and coined the term “**unobtrusive helpmate.**”

Believing that all assistance dog organizations in America and around the world, guide, hearing, service and social/therapy should talk to and share ideas with one another, she argued for the creation of and became the founding President of **Assistance Dogs International.**

Additionally she was asked by the U.S. Justice Department to help develop the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations** regarding assistance dogs and was invited to the Rose Garden for President George H.W. Bush’s signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

In 1991, she left CCI to found the **Assistance Dog Institute** to educate others on how to train service dogs and to develop service dog programs thereby reducing the horrendous 5-10 year wait. The Institute expanded into the world’s first university awarding **Associate, Bachelor and Master Degrees in dog studies.**

In 1992, Bonnie responded to the Delta Society’s request for help to start what has become their very successful **People Pet Partner’s** program. The **National Disaster Search Foundation** also asked for her help in development of their search dog program.

Despite a **Master’s** and a **Doctoral** degree, Bonnie believed that working with dogs had taught her the most about life, so she began a program whereby **teens at-risk** trained animal shelter dogs and later *service dogs for people with disabilities*. For that she received **Oprah’s “Use Your Life”** award in 2001.

Believing that individuals with disabilities needed representation in the assistance dog world, she invited a group together to create an organization provisionally named the **Assistance Dog User Council (ADUC)**. This group has morphed into the International Association of Assistance Dog Partners (IAADP) currently offering many benefits to their members.

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Simultaneously Bonnie created the **Assistance Dog United Campaign (ADUC)**, a program that provides vouchers to low-income individuals with disabilities to take to the program of their choice to get an assistance dog. Like IAADP, this organization is about empowering the dog user, in this case financially, to ensure their voice will be heard when applying for a dog. ADUC has granted hundreds of vouchers and program development grants. Her research into **early puppy training** moved well beyond the norm such that pups at Bergin University now begins their training at **3-3.5 weeks of age**. This early learning not only teaches a pup how to learn but it makes lasting behavioral impressions in the mind of the adult dog.

In October 2000, with the help of ANECAH of the Netherlands, Bonnie gathered a group of European programs together to share in the results of her research, while simultaneously **seeding the beginning of a Euro-Assistance Dog organization** to hopefully become a part of Assistance Dogs International. This dream is now reality with both the European organization in place and its membership in Assistance Dog International secured.

Bonnie has **spoken or taught worldwide**. She has educated people in Canada, Europe and Japan, in addition to the U.S. Unfortunately, her flight to Buenos Aires was cancelled on 9/11/01 – an historic date known around the world simply as “911.”

Reading increases problem-solving skills in humans. **Teaching dogs to read visual symbols** in the form of word commands to build their service dog problem-solving skills became another of her goals. With a Stanford University study supporting her work, tests show that the dog has sufficient cognition to respond to doggie stick figure postures with no prior training beyond the initial word reading exercises.

Bonnie also employed University dogs to sniff out the presence of the female **vine mealy bug’s pheromone** in local vineyards thereby locating the pest before it spread through the entire vineyard.

In appreciation of her work and in recognition of its expanded academic stature, **the Institute was renamed the Bergin University of Canine Studies** by the Board of Trustees in 2008. The Assistance Dog Institute name remains in use as a college of the university.

Dr. Bergin has made a contribution to the lives of both disabled individuals and dogs by expanding the capabilities and role each is able to assume in society.

Published Books:

Author: *Teach Your Dog To Read*. Broadway Books, 2006.

Author: *The SMARTEST DOG: The Selection, Training and Placement of Service Dogs*. Assistance Dog Institute, 1998.

Author: *Bonnie Bergin’s Guide to Bringing Out the Best in Your Dog*. Little Brown and Company, 1995.

Television Series:

1994 *You and Your Great Dog*. - KQED TV Dr. Bergin hosts series

Awards and Recognition:

2001 Angel Productions “Use Your Life Award” [Oprah]

2000 Daily Point of Light – George Bush’s *Presidential Points of Light* Award

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