



PHOTOS BY JOHN RABY / AP  
Ned and Hercules are seen May 15 at West Virginia International Yeager Airport, where they are used to keep birds and other wildlife away from the airfield, in Charleston, West Virginia.

# PAW PATROL

## Meet Hercules and Ned, the border collies fending off wildlife at West Virginia’s busiest airport

By JOHN RABY  
The Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Hercules and Ned have quite the spacious office at West Virginia’s busiest airport. The border collies and their handler make daily patrols along the milelong airfield to ensure birds and other wildlife stay away from planes and keep passengers and crew safe. Hercules is also the chief ambassador, soaking in affection from passengers inside the terminal while calming some nervously waiting to board a flight at West Virginia International Yeager Airport. Chris Keyser, the dogs’ handler and the airport’s wildlife specialist, said preventing a bird from hitting a plane “can make a difference for someone’s life.”

### HOW IT STARTED

Collisions between wildlife and planes are common at airports nationwide. With that in mind, Yeager management in 2018 bought Hercules at the recommendation of a wildlife biologist. Hercules spent the first



Hercules greets a passenger at West Virginia International Yeager Airport.

18 months of his life training to herd geese and sheep around his birthplace at Charlotte, North Carolina-based Flyaway Geese, which teaches border collies to help businesses address nuisance wildlife problems. When Hercules stepped onto Charleston’s airfield for the first time, “I held my breath,” Flyaway Geese owner Rebecca Gibson said. “But boy, he took hold of the reins. It was his place.

“He’s done an amazing job and has just been a great dog for them. We’re very proud of him.” Along the way, Hercules became a local celebrity. He has his own Instagram and TikTok accounts and regularly hosts groups of schoolchildren. Now 8, Hercules has some help. Ned was 2 when he was welcomed into the fold last year from another kennel where he trained to herd

goats and geese. Ned has shadowed Hercules, following commands from Keyser and learning safety issues such as not venturing onto the runway. “Ned’s ready to go,” Keyser said. “He’s picked up on all that. He’s doing fantastic, running birds off.” Inside the airport operations center, Hercules is laid back until he’s told it’s time to work, barking at the door in anticipation. Ned, on the other hand, is

always moving. When not outside, he’ll bring his blue bouncy ball to anyone willing to play fetch.

### A MOUNTAINTOP MENAGERIE

Charleston’s airport is on top of a mountain and has a menagerie of wildlife, including Canada geese, hawks, ducks, songbirds and bats. After it rains, worms come to the surface and cause an

See PATROL, 3C

# Why do I write?

I can’t write. I don’t know why. Every time I sit down, I can’t do it. Namely, I keep asking myself “Why are you writing this?” Then I get up and go outside. I’ve been writing professionally for upwards of a decade. And suddenly, I don’t know why I’m doing it. What’s wrong with me? Since my wife and I finished walking the Camino de Santiago, life just feels different. I don’t mean “different” in a woo-woo, spooky way. I mean in a practical way. Part of my mind is still hovering somewhere over the Iberian Peninsula, flying over orange groves, deserts, and Galician mountains. Maybe I feel strange because you don’t spend 40 days on foot, beneath a hot Spanish sun, carrying your possessions on your back, and not find yourself a little overwhelmed when you walk into, say, Publix supermarket.

Our local grocery store has 1,008,327 different varieties of orange juice. We have pulp free, pulp intensive, 100% juice, 50% juice, and %100 juiceless orange juice. There is almost an entire aisle dedicated solely to peanut butter. Maybe I’m disoriented because, as you walk the Camino, you are walking mostly in silence, through primitive villages, some with less than 50 residents. And it’s so quiet out there. Whereas, America is anything but silent.

When our plane touched down in Chicago, my wife and I scurried across O’Hare International Airport to catch our connecting flight. The knowledge that we were in actually America hadn’t quite settled into my brain yet. I still FELT like we were in Spain. So when I found an airline employee, I asked for directions to our gate in Spanish. The employee just looked at me with a blank face and replied: “Learn freakin’ English, sir.” And I knew I was home. Since then, nothing has seemed the same. I’ve been spending a lot of time in the yard. I find that I can’t sit indoors. Namely, because I don’t really know what to do with myself inside. Heaven knows, it’s almost impossible to sit still long enough to write. This is a big change for me. Last year, for example, I spent most of my year working on three separate book projects—sometimes writing at a computer for eight to 12 hours per day. There were some days I never saw the sun. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not complaining, I LOVE my job. I feel fortunate to have it. But is it natural to sit for eight hours?

So I cut the grass. I painted the shed. I built new steps for the shed. I planted some cast-iron plants, tea olive trees, and Tom Corley azaleas. I weeded the driveway. I picked up pine cones. Now that I’m finished with all those chores, I don’t know what to do with myself. I’ve been playing the fiddle a lot. My fiddle sort of became its own character out on the trail. Other pilgrims were constantly stopping and saying, “Hey! You’re the Fiddle Guy!” That became my name. Fiddle Guy. Then, they’d ask me to play a tune. So I would. It didn’t matter where we

See WRITE, 3C

COLUMNIST



SEAN DIETRICH

# How to improve quality time with your family at dinner

According to LifeSkills Regional Prevention Center Manager Kaitlyn Slaughter, the Dinner Table Project, created in 2015, is a successful program designed by the Search Institute to encourage families to eat together so they can grow closer through conversation, have better relationships, and enjoy more uninterrupted family fun. Slaughter said it’s really easy. “You sit down with your family, eat, play games and talk to each other. There are no distractions like TV, phones or electronic devices.” “Studies have shown that regularly sharing a meal together can improve academic performance and self-esteem and promote a sense of resilience. It can also

lower the risk of substance abuse, teen pregnancy and depression,” Slaughter added. “It has been proven to decrease the likelihood of developing an eating disorder and can also lower rates of obesity.” The Search Institute has identified 40 positive supports and strengths that young people need to succeed. They focus on relationships, opportunities, values, commitment, and more. The Dinner Table Project introduces families to two or three assets each month and provides them with ways to incorporate these supports into everyday life. You can review the assets at [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org). Throughout the years, The Dinner Table Project has evolved

and grown, but its core mission remains unchanged. In January 2020, Table Talks, a newsletter designed to encourage meaningful conversations with teens was introduced. No matter which newsletter your family chooses, you are encouraged to make it a habit to eat together at least once a week without any electronics. “We have little tabletop cardboard boxes available. They are to be used to store your electronic devices in while you are enjoying dinner,” said Slaughter. Most families choose to leave them in their box during the meal and some families decide to leave them in their box all evening long so they can spend even more quality time

COLUMNIST



MAUREEN MAHANAY

together.” Slaughter says that kids spend a lot more time on their phones than parents realize. AND many parents don’t often realize how much time they spend on their own phones. “This Project definitely raises awareness,” said Slaughter. LifeSkills Regional Prevention Center collaborates with local schools and other organizations to distribute monthly newsletters filled with simple recipes, conversation starters, fun dinner table

games, and more. For additional resources visit the website at [thedinnertableproject.org](http://thedinnertableproject.org) or follow us on Facebook and Instagram @thedinnertableproject. If you’d like to be added to the mailing list or would like to get a tabletop box, send your request to [mslaughter@lifeskills.com](mailto:mslaughter@lifeskills.com) — Maureen Mahaney coordinates public information for LifeSkills, Inc. a non-profit, behavioral health care corporation that plans for and serves the people of southcentral Kentucky in three main areas: mental health, addiction, and developmental disabilities. Her column appears monthly.