

'Real-world utility': Edmonton NAIT grads invent life alert system to be used by service dogs

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Photo caption

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Lassie 2.0 was created by three biomedical engineering technology grads from the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT). Their invention is now a finalist for the 2022 Capstone Project of the Year Award handed out by the [Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta \(ASET\)](#).

Michelle Gariepy, a co-creator of Lassie 2.0, said the project includes three components — the handler's device, a dog vest and a mobile app.

“The way it works is in the event of an emergency the service dog would press a button that's on the handler's device. The handler wears this device when they go out; inside it has a device that provides GPS location,” she said.

“When the service dog presses that button in the event of an emergency, it sends a message to our mobile app that we created.”

Gariepy said the mobile device then sends out an email or text to a pre-determined emergency contact that will notify them the button has been pressed and give them the location of the handler, which allows for someone not in the area to call for help.

She added the mobile app also activates the dog's vest, which flashes with LED lights and amplifies tones from a speaker to draw attention to the situation.

“If the service dog were to go and try to find an individual out in the crowd for help, it would draw that attention and someone could follow the dog to the individual, the handler, having that medical emergency and would help with the response time of getting help,” said Gariepy.

Gariepy added that service dogs are trained to push buttons such as elevator and mobility assistance door buttons, so they believe it's “easy enough” to train a service dog to push the button on the handler's Lassie 2.0 device.

Service Dog Canada estimates there are 55,000 service dogs in the country, a number that has been increasing. Gariepy said it's important for the public to know how to respond when they're approached by a service dog.

“Since there are more service dogs out there, we felt we needed to kind of bridge that communication gap between service dogs, and their handlers and the general public just for those times of emergencies,” she said.

In an emailed statement Barry Cavanaugh, CEO of ASET, said Lassie 2.0 has potential for “real-world utility.”

“The former NAIT team came up with this idea on their own and should be commended for uniquely combining animal assistance with biomedical engineering technological innovation,” he said.

Gariepy said the group is excited to hear they were named a finalist for the award and it validates all their hard work. She added they are not actively working on Lassie 2.0 now but hope to pursue it further in the future.

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