

Steel Dog shares her tales with fans

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Rebecca Droke/Post-Gazette

Carol Lynn Vicini has written two comic books featuring her dog Pearl (aka Steel Dog).

By Pohla Smith / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Pearl, an 8-year-old white boxer, is one hot dog.

Known under her stage name -- Steel Dog -- she stars in two locally written comic books, makes up to 20 appearances a year at libraries, charity events and festivals, and even has her own Facebook page.

She is also considered part of Pittsburgh's official man-dog superhero team with a local actor/entertainer known as Steel Man (who never gives his real name).

It may seem like a lot of work for a dog, but her owner, comic book author Carol Lynn Vicini of Whitehall, says Pearl loves it, especially her interaction with children.

"It's such a unique situation," she said. "I wear a dress on most outings, and I always wear a hat. [Pearl] knows it's a day to go to a show. She knows she's going out to meet the children. She gives me a lot of joy in my life."

Miss Vicini, 62, the mother of a grown son and formerly married, has embarked in what she calls her third career -- writing comic books. During her 30s, she was an executive secretary and later helped with different family projects, retiring in her mid-50s.

Miss Vicini went on to write "The Adventures of Steel Dog" and "The Adventures of Steel Dog: Garden Party" and is now working on two more comic books.

One of their latest appearances was at a garden party at the Vandergrift Public Library on June 15, where Miss Vicini read one of her comic books, and Steel Dog (dressed in a neck scarf of gold fur) gave paw shakes to the children while they snacked on lemonade and peanut butter and jelly tea sandwiches. Along for the trip was Steel Dog's "brother" Floppy, a 2 1/2-year-old white rabbit.

It was Steel Dog's first garden party on the storytelling tours she's been taking since 2007 when she was 2.

They also make frequent appearances at Pittsburgh Comicon events in Monroeville -- with one of the highlights being a visit with Stan Lee, creator of the Spider-Man series.

Miss Vicini's books were published by her family's business, Pittsburgh Steel Man Industrial Media Inc., and are available for \$5 at New Dimension Comic stores, the Vandergrift library (Vandergrift is Miss Vicini's hometown) or online.

She soon hopes to publish "The Adventures of Steel Dog and Steel Puppy: Christmas" and "The Adventures of Steel Dog and Steel Puppy: Winter Wonderland." The puppy in the books is her 4-year-old brown boxer, Buddy, but he doesn't accompany them on appearances.

Miss Vicini and Steel Dog plan more appearances this summer, including the Westmoreland Arts & Heritage Festival on Sunday (two book reading performances at 1 and 3:30 p.m.) at Twin Lakes Park in Greensburg and the 10th annual Festa Italiana in Kennedy Park in Vandergrift on Aug. 18. See more on Pittsburgh Steel Dog's Facebook page.

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