Xavier the guide dog pays namesake school a visit

BY JACK BAKER

FOR nine years Xavier High School’s Joseph House has sold thousands of chocolates to raise money for their chosen charity.

Last Tuesday, past and present Joseph House captains together with Xavier school captains were on hand to witness the fruits of their charitable labour, paws and all.

Guide dog Xavier, aptly named after the school that financed his training, visited Albury last week with his companion Jenny Baltiesch and her husband, Phil.

The couple made the decision to drive up to Albury from Geelong after meeting several Joseph House students at Xavier’s guide dog training graduation last year.

It’s the first time the school has been visited by one of its sponsors, probably because Xavier is the first of the school’s three sponsored dogs to graduate.

Joseph, the school’s original sponsored dog, failed to graduate his training but has since found a role as a companion dog for a sick child.

Former Joseph House captain Thomas Fawcett said he could remember why his house settled on Guide Dogs Victoria as a charity. “We had a house meeting and there was an opportunity to raise money for a charity,” Mr Fawcett said.

“We were throwing ideas around and someone mentioned guide dogs.”

“When we realised how much (training) costs and the role the dog plays in someone’s life we realised it would be such a great thing to do.”

Teacher Margaret Beecher believes it was a good choice. “Joseph House (values) are based on hard work, loyalty and generosity to others,” she said.

“So the dog became something the house could gravitate around.”

For Mrs Baltiesch, continued donations from people like Xavier High School students means she can exercise increased independence compared to walking with a cane.

She said Xavier, like her previous two guide dogs, was a big part of her life, helping her to ride daily on buses and trains.

With the average guide dog costing $30,000 to breed, train and match with an owner, Guide Dogs Victoria eliminates all personal costs for the dog’s companion.

Xavier High School captain Tara Sullivan said it was a rewarding experience to actually meet the dog and owners her school was helping.

“Before we met Xavier we only had photos ... of him on our home room wall,” she said.

“But then when we actually met Jenny and saw the dog at work it’s such a great feeling to know you helped bring that about.”

Xavier High School continues to sponsor Xavier and recently started sponsoring female puppy, Joey.

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