

Secretary of State John Kerry flies to Maine to pick up new dog

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Courtesy of Frances Plessner

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry picked up his puppy, Ben, from dog breeder and trainer Frances Plessner of Puddleduck Boarding Kennel in Morrill. She spent the last two months training the yellow Labrador retriever.

MORRILL, Maine — This week, Secretary of State John Kerry flew into Maine on some very important business.

No, it wasn't a matter of national or international consequences. Kerry came to pick up his new yellow Labrador puppy, Ben, from a Waldo County woman who spent the last two months training him.

Frances Plessner of [Puddleduck Boarding Kennel](#) in Morrill said that Ben was a pleasure to work with, and so was the politician. She spent about an hour Tuesday evening working with Kerry and his dog together before Kerry and the retriever drove off in a black SUV.

"He was really good. He's a really smart puppy. He pretty much exceeded my expectations," she said of Ben, who will be a family pet. "John Kerry loves the dog. ... [Kerry] was awesome. So polite, so nice. I honestly thought I would be so nervous, but he was so relaxed."

She said that the secretary of state got Ben as a 5-month-old puppy from a woman in Massachusetts, who told him that the dog needed a lot of training. When Kerry asked the woman for help finding a trainer, Plessner, who raises Labrador retrievers and trains dogs professionally, was at the top of the list.

"He called me and asked if I'd train his dog," Plessner said. "I felt really honored."

For two months, she worked with Ben, training him to walk on a leash, heel, stay and more. Periodically, she would take calls from Kerry, who wanted to see how things were going.

“I thought maybe he was going to be a jerk, but he’s not,” Plessner said. “He’d call me, even with his busy life. He’d call me when he was in other countries. He just wanted the best for the dog — not over-the-top, just whatever Ben needed.”

According to the [Boston Globe](#), Ben is named in honor of Ben Franklin, also known as the “Father of the American Foreign Service.”

On Monday, members of the U.S. Secret Service paid a visit to Plessner’s rural home. They wanted to see the area where she’d be working with Kerry and also wanted to know where the nearest hospital was located and how long it would take to get an emergency response team to Morrill.

“They were really easy-going, nice, nice people,” Plessner said.

On Tuesday afternoon, Kerry arrived in a convoy of about five SUVs. She said that she kept quiet about his visit out of respect to the secretary of state, even when her sister called to say she thought that a drug raid was happening in Morrill because of all the SUVs driving around.

“I just said, ‘Huh,’” Plessner recalled. “I’m pretty good with secrets.”

After she worked with Kerry and Ben Tuesday afternoon, the secretary and retriever left for Bangor International Airport. It was hard for Plessner to watch Ben ride away.

“Ben was looking at me,” she said. “I love the dogs I work with. I tend to get attached to them. I believe in what I do. We’re a team, me and the dog.”