Say Hello, Wave Goodbye

The story of Max the Love Dog

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Pet Partners is required to file financial information with several states. Ten of those states will provide copies to their residents upon request:

California: Pet Partners is registered as ‘Pet Partners Therapy Animals’ in the state of California.

Florida: A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE, WITHIN THE STATE, 1-800-HELP-FLA. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE. CH3226.

Maryland: For the cost of copies and postage, Office of the Secretary of State, State House, Annapolis, MD 21401.

Mississippi: The official registration and financial information of Pet Partners may be obtained from the Mississippi Secretary of State’s office by calling 1-888-236-6167. Registration by the Secretary of State does not imply endorsement.

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New York: Office of the Attorney General, Department of Law, Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.

North Carolina: Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Licensing Branch at 1-888-836-4989. The license is not an endorsement by the state. Pet Partners is registered as ‘Pet Partners Nonprofit Corporation’ in North Carolina.

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Virginia: State Division of Consumer Affairs, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, PO Box 1163, Richmond, VA 23218.

Washington: Charities Division, Office of the Secretary of State, State of Washington, Olympia, WA 98504-0422, 1-800-332-4483.

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**SPECIES COUNT 2015**

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**Grand Total** 13,810

*over one million visits last year in all 50 states*
As we embark on our 39th year, the recognition of the impact animals have on human health and wellness continues to grow. It’s wonderful that one of our founders, Dr. Bill McCulloch, is still active and can share with us stories from almost four decades ago. It’s hard not to wonder what his brother, Dr. Michael McCulloch, and Dr. Leo Bustad would think of the human-animal bond world in 2016. Dr. Bustad coined the term “human-animal bond” describing the mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals. This includes, but is not limited to, emotional, psychological, and physical interactions.

In 2015, almost 14,000 therapy animal teams were registered with Pet Partners. From a rabbit that sits patiently while a child reads, to a dog that reminds a person living with dementia of their “heart dog”, to a mini-horse delighting children at a camp for military children who have a parent deployed, so many of you selflessly shared your wonderful animals with others. Thank you.

We’re proud to report that 2015 also saw the addition of other wonderful volunteers to the Pet Partners family. Our Human-Animal Bond Advisory Board met for the first time under the leadership of Dr. Aubrey Fine. We are committed to the vision of the founders to be at the forefront of this life-affirming work and grateful to this group of leaders in their respective fields who are making time to contribute.

A more formal working relationship with HABRI recognizes the importance of developing scientific evidence that shows the positive human health outcomes associated with the human-animal bond. Steven Feldman, HABRI Executive Director said: “HABRI has the scientific research programs and Pet Partners has the paws on the ground – it’s a great combination.”

Pet Partners and HABRI will work together to support pet-friendly public policies, and to arm Pet Partners therapy animal teams with the latest research results to persuade more people and institutions to recognize the impact of animal assisted interventions.

Though we don’t register ducks, here at headquarters we often feel like the proverbial duck that looks calm on the surface but is frantically paddling underneath. We’re undergoing an organizational transformation and we all know regardless of how good or important, sometimes change can be difficult. Thank you to everyone who is along with us on this journey. Think of what we can accomplish together if we all keep paddling!

Learn more about the Human-Animal Bond at www.petpartners.org
Walk to Fundraise

Pet Partners has teamed up with Wooftrax, a free app that lets you raise money every time you walk. Download for iPhone or Android and select Pet Partners from the list of organizations. The donations are made possible from sponsors and advertisers of the app. Find out more at www.wooftrax.com. You will raise money every time you walk – it’s that simple!

Website Updates

We have updated the workshop/evaluation calendar to make it easier to navigate. As with every website it is still a work in progress, but this is a big step forward. We now have almost 14,000 registered users on the website. New features will be added throughout 2016. Details will come out in our regular e-newsletters and in Interactions.

In the Shop

New for your therapy animals - vests, scarves and bandanas, and just in for 2016 – apparel for you to wear. We have oxford shirts, polo shirts and fleeces that all feature the Pet Partners logo. If you are looking for some wardrobe additions, check out the shop! All sizes are available for two and four legged wearers.

Fundraising

National Therapy Animal Day™ is being celebrated by Treats & Sweets Day. So, if you fancy cooking up a storm and joining hundreds of bakers, read more about it on page 5 and help raise funds by treating others to a taste of your cooking skills! If you can’t join in you can always give a virtual cake in the shape of a donation!

Press Office

New on the site – a Press Office. Our new Press Office will provide access to resources journalists need to learn more about us and our spokespeople, including our Chief Medical Officer, Dr. David Williams. To see the stories we generate as a result – go to the “News” section under About Us.

Facebook

Do you follow us on Facebook? It is a great way to keep up to date and see stories from teams across the country. If you “like” the page you can keep in the loop with current events and news. So give Pet Partners the “thumbs up” in 2016.

Recognizing our Founders

Dr. Melissa Bain was named recipient of the 2016 Bustad Companion Animal Veterinarian of the Year Award during the American Veterinary Medical Association’s Conference in Chicago. She has devoted her career to enhancing the human-animal bond through research on companion animal behavior problems, enrichment of shelter animals, and the effects of different training methods on dog behavior. Named in honor of the late Leo K. Bustad, one of the founders of Pet Partners and an internationally recognized pioneer in the field of human-animal interactions, the Award recognizes the outstanding work of veterinarians in preserving and protecting human-animal relationships. Read more online in the press office.
Mark Your Calendars for the Sweetest Event of the Year…

Treats & Sweets Day honoring All Therapy Animals
Saturday, April 30, 2016

Will you “bake” a difference for Pet Partners? Help us spread the word about how special and loving therapy animals are as well as raise money for our favorite animals by hosting a baking fundraiser in honor of Pet Partners! Your participation will bring much-needed attention to the vital role therapy animals play in enhancing the health and well-being of humans.

In honor of National Therapy Animal Day™ Saturday, April 30th, Pet Partners supporters from all over the country will be breaking out their mixing bowls, putting on their aprons and whipping up some Treats & Sweets for their animal and human friends alike. Treats & Sweets Day is our exclusive national signature fundraiser event, and is a piece of cake to celebrate.

While many bakers will choose to host their sales on April 30 in celebration of the National Therapy Animal Day, you may also pick any other day during the month of April that works better for you and your sweet-toothed customers. No matter the day you choose to honor this special occasion, you’ll make an positive impact so don’t delay in signing up!

Our aim is to make it as easy as possible for you. By registering at www.treatsandsweetsdaysday.org, you’ll be able to efficiently spread the word about your Treats & Sweets day efforts with an easy to set up fundraising page, access to many tips and printable templates and decorations.

Whether you accept online donations in exchange for your tasty treats, host a bake sale table at your workplace or at a facility where you have therapy animal visits, or host a fun Treats & Sweets Day party at your home, you’ll be helping to honor and support the exceptional work of therapy animal teams across the country.

We will help you get started by sending you a free baker start-up kit in the mail. It includes a fundraising guide and fun promotional materials such as stickers and a poster to help you spread the word.

Participants who donate or raise at least $100 toward their individual fundraising efforts will also receive a commemorative National Therapy Animal Day t-shirt. Bakers could also earn other exciting fundraising prizes including a Treats and Sweets apron and baseball cap!

Too busy to bake?

You can make a donation through the website- we love that kind of dough!

Recipes on the website include special treats for dogs, cats and other species!

Top donors are featured on the Treats & Sweets website and in Interactions!

BAKE.EAT.LOVE
"If love and prayers could help, Max would live forever." That was the reaction from an Activity Director of a large assisted living facility when owner Annette Thier had to break the news that Max had been diagnosed with cancer. Another facility held prayer meetings and many residents made cards for their favorite four-legged therapist.

Annette describes this journey with Max as having helped both of them find a deeper connection with those they visit. Many patients are also suffering life-threatening illnesses and Max has found a new purpose in fighting back against cancer.

Max is a handsome German Shepherd who came into Thier’s life 7 years ago. Annette, from Covington, Louisiana, had been looking for a dog having lost a shepherd to hip dysplasia. After much research she found a breeder who bred rarely and had exacting standards for potential adopters. Annette would interview the breeder, the breeder would interview Annette. Socialization has always been a priority for Annette and her dogs. She loved the fact this was not a puppy mill and that the dogs were allowed to run and play with the breeder’s children. She spent time observing the puppies play and how they reacted to her and then spent time playing with them herself. One puppy stood out: smart, alert, sweet and gentle with no signs of fear or aggression. The Vollhard puppy test was given and he passed with flying colors, confirming Annette’s initial assessment: a healthy, perfect puppy to join the Thier family: a blessed find since the breeder also felt Annette would be worthy of one of her darlings!

The idea for therapy started when Annette’s mother needed nursing home care. She often took her cat to visit and noticed the positive impact these visits had on her mother and others. On a trip with her husband, Annette was approached by a gentleman who remarked that Max seemed well trained and communicated with Annette beautifully. He introduced Annette to Pet Partners and once she found the website, she was hooked!

Although Max had been through puppy, intermediate and advanced obedience training the course prepared Annette for therapy dog work by explaining the different patient types, and covered practical aspects of therapy work: visits in a medical setting. This enabled her to feel confident of a good fit for her and Max. He passed the AKC Canine Good Citizen test and the Pet Partner team evaluation with flying colors and it was time for his first official hospital visit!

Even though Annette was anxious, Max was not. They entered the parking lot of the St. Tammany Parish Hospital, and Max wagged his tail furiously. He knew what they were there to do and couldn’t wait to get started. At the pediatric ward, the volunteer coordinator had arranged for the local newspaper to cover the story of their first ever therapy dog.

Max’s visits involve a range of activities, from simple petting to helping in the gym with rehab. Max helps encourage mobility and specific exercises are planned by the therapy team and documented in treatment notes.

As a big dog, Max can look intimidating. Annette is also conscious that his giant paws can be too much for delicate elderly skin. So he was taught to wave, showing how friendly he is and avoiding direct contact when it is not appropriate. If they can’t enter the room of a patient, they sit and wave from the corridor wishing everyone a speedy recovery and making a connection even if he can’t get up close.

Visits are so popular that Annette has engaged assistance from her “wise, wonderful, women.” These
are volunteers who help Annette record who she has visited. Keeping Max on a leash at all times and engaging with patients leaves her without a spare hand to make notes. Max becomes a big part of the life of each patient – allowing them a short time to forget their problems and feel unconditional love.

It was on one of these visits that Max earned his full name of “Max the Love Dog.” Annette’s family members are all Saint’s fans and his leash has the team’s name on it. He stopped to visit with two boys and one said Max was a Saint. But Annette knew that the child was too young to read. Instead, the boy had seen Max’s “halo” marking between his ears. The second boy said quickly “he’s not a Saint. He is the Love Dog. He gives love and loves my hugs.” And so the name was born.

Annette takes her role in visiting seriously. She will explain how Max is prepared, especially to the children. She will guide them on how to approach him and look for signs if he is tired or happy. She believes this is important so children (and adults) understand how to be with other dogs when they return home or consider having a dog of their own.

Annette believes that standards are important and her role in demonstrating this has been responsible for some in facilities changing their minds about therapy animals. Initially there were those who doubted – but almost all have come around. Doctors and nurses who weren’t keen in the beginning now stop by for a visit of their own. A patient who refused to have Max visit soon changed her mind saying, “I still hate dogs. I just love Max.”

In early 2015 Max didn’t seem himself. Something was wrong. Annette took him to the veterinarian and their worst fears were confirmed. Max had cancer. A visit to a specialist followed and surgery was ruled out. Annette returned to her vet and they considered the options. It was decided that an aggressive chemotherapy program was not the best choice, but there were drugs that could help him be comfortable.

Soon Max became lethargic and seemed to be going downhill. Annette consulted her veterinarian and they concluded that Max was missing his therapy work. Annette contacted Pet Partners to find out if his medication type would stop him from making visits. It didn’t. She spoke at length with the directors of the two cancer facilities that she had been visiting and they assessed the situation. They saw no problem from a medical standpoint.

As soon as Max realized where he was going, he was filled with energy and purpose. He was greeted at the facility like a long-lost friend, and started to thrive again.

Annette is conscious that visits have to be shorter and there aren’t so many of them. She speaks to her veterinarian and the facilities and all agreed that Max can keep doing this important work. But one day it will stop, and Annette knows this is coming soon.

For now, Max shares a deeper bond with the patients. A lady with the same diagnosis complained to Annette that her medication had caused weight gain and 3 complete wardrobes had been bought. She added that at least if Max experiences the same, he can grow into his wardrobe! “Should Max lose his hair,” said another patient, “he shouldn’t worry as our hair does not make us who we are.” She had lost all of hers.

Thinking about life without Max is hard. A few friends suggested the idea of finding another dog. Annette’s reaction was to dismiss this at first. A new puppy and a sick dog? But then Annette dreamt that she should “let Max choose” – something she dismissed as crazy! However, the next day a nurse asked if she would get another dog and suggested that she “let Max choose.” Annette decided it was worth considering.

Hearing the news about Max, his breeder called Annette. There were two puppies available that were Max’s cousins. Max met both of them and immediately took to one puppy (the other nipped Annette’s husband)! And so Dr. Jack came to the Thier house. He shares his name with a hospice and palliative director who had served for more than 40 years and also the very first patient Max had ever visited.

Annette has had some time to steel herself for the inevitable loss that is to come. No other dog will replace Max - that’s just not how these things work. But Dr. Jack will help Annette keep doing this vital work that brings comfort to so many. And, for now, Max is happy.
Many have owned dogs for years and know and love them dearly. Whether in the domestic bliss and curled up happily in a bed, or displaying the many instinctive behaviors like defending territory and burying bones, our four-legged friends show a wide-range of behaviors as they interact with people. But if you ever want to gain a deeper understanding of their signs and signals, the Canine Body Language course is a great way to get started.

This 1.5hr course is designed to promote safe therapy animal visits through increased awareness dog body language as well as specific strategies handlers can employ to support their animal and reduce anxiety or fear.

This course was also designed to meet a portion of the requirements as published by The Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America’s Animals in Healthcare Facilities: Recommendations to Minimize Potential Risks, published in 2015.

Content is appropriate for teams pursuing therapy animal registration as well as experienced teams. Additionally, facility or program staff who interact with therapy animals may benefit from familiarizing themselves with common body language cues.

There are 6 modules explaining how to understand your dogs’ level of comfort with examples and scenarios that you may experience. There is an assessment at the end that will help you interpret the material in a practical way.

To access the course, go to www.petpartners.org and login or create a Volunteer Center account. It is available at $20 for current Pet Partners volunteers and $45 for the general public.

“The benefit is two-fold. First, we leverage our leadership position to educate everyone who is involved in making safe and effective therapy animal visits. This means that when our teams encounter others, the likelihood of safe interactions is increased. Second, by more people taking the class we can ensure delivery to our members at a discounted rate. This will allow us to deliver more content, more often.”

“Learning to observe one’s therapy partner at all times is critical to prevent unwanted outcomes for the animals as well as for the people one is serving. In addition, it helps to gauge fatigue or stress and ensure that therapy partners are enjoying the experience.

Their welfare is paramount! This course covers the basics of understanding body language in a very user-friendly manner, with much solid information and many good illustrations. The course also highlights how to handle situations when dogs are becoming stressed, which is essential. The course will be of great value for all Pet Partners teams!”

Risë VanFleet, PhD, CDBCA
Author, the award-winning
Play Therapy with Kids & Canines
President, International Institute for
Animal Assisted Play Therapy
A 2015 study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* demonstrated sharply lowered blood pressure lead to significantly longer lives. They found among 9,361 hypertension patients followed for an average of 3.2 years, there were 27% fewer deaths and 38% fewer cases of heart failure among patients who achieved a blood pressure target of 120 as opposed to those who achieved the current target of 140.

The question is how do we best achieve that target blood pressure? Simply adding or increasing hypertension medication raises issues of increased side effects, cost and patient compliance.

One solution may be the addition of a companion animal. Studies show dogs decrease blood pressure by two mechanisms: decreasing the stress response, and increasing people’s participation in exercise.

The stress response occurs when the body is over-stimulated, leading to an overproduction of stress hormones. These hormones increase blood pressure and heart rate that can lead to increased heart attacks, strokes and death.

The presence of a therapy dog reduces the stress response. Nagengast showed in 1997 the presence of a friendly dog was effective at reducing the blood pressure and heart rate. Viau in 2010 demonstrated when a therapy dog was introduced into the families of 35 autistic children, their cortisol levels were suppressed.

In 2009 Coakley and Mahoney proved in a Massachusetts General Hospital Study - “Health Benefits after a Ten Minute Therapy Dog Visit” - that a ten minute therapy dog visit lead to a 3% slower breathing rate, a 22% drop in pain severity, a 19% boost in energy, a 48% decrease in depression, a 64% drop in feelings of anger and a 39% decrease in fatigue.

Dogs also increase physical activity. Studies show dog owners exercise more than non-dog owners. Hamm and Epping state dogs increase adherence to exercise regimens. Friedman proves pet ownership increases survival among heart attack victims. Studies from Germany, Australia and the United States demonstrate people with pets make fewer trips to the doctor than people with no pets.

The dog does not have to be owned by the individual to increase physical activity - simply participating in a dog walking animal assisted therapy program produces similar effects. In their study “Dog walking: Motivation for adherence to a walking program,” Johnson and Meadows show commitment to a dog that is not one’s own may effectively facilitate physical activity.

The authors studied adherence and outcomes of a graduated walking program when 26 public housing residents walked a certified therapy dog with a handler. Participants walked 20 minutes, 5 days/week for 26 or 50 weeks; in all, 13 participants in the 50 week group had a mean adherence of 52% and a weight loss of 5 pounds. Participants most commonly stated reason for adherence was the dogs “need us to walk them.”

The evidence is clear: dogs do make a difference. By decreasing our stress and making us exercise more, they can help us achieve our blood pressure goals, possibly without the ill effects of medications. And if those effects increase the quality and longevity of our lives by decreasing cardiac morbidity and mortality, then dogs can truly claim the title of “man’s best friend.”

In a recent survey of Pet Partners members we asked, “What type of information would you like to receive?” Among the top three highest ranking responses were research advances in Animal Assisted Interventions and positive medical outcomes associated with companion animal ownership. In each edition of Interactions our Chief Medical Officer will address these questions.
NEW FOR 2016

From your feedback we know how popular our team stories are to our readers - so we are going to do more of them! Interactions will now be published more frequently, and we are starting a page on the website to feature more of your work. If you have a very special story to tell please make sure that you share details when you log a visit in the volunteer center and we will contact you for more information.

Northeast

Karri Malone & Scraps
the Tripod Rescue
Therapy Dog
Bristol, CT

His Petfinder profile read, “I only have three legs, but I’m very athletic and loving,” and Karri Malone knew she had found her future companion. Karri saw there was something extra special about this rambunctious young dog when her husband’s grandmother went into hospice. The grandmother requested one last visit from the dogs and Scraps wanted to be on the bed by her side. Despite his sometimes playful personality, once he was placed on the bed he didn’t move, did not ask to be let down, and remained still as if knowing exactly where he was needed. Scraps gently placed his paw on the grandmother’s hand and Karri knew he was ideally suited to therapy work.

Scraps proudly visits two different rehab/convalescent homes in his community. Many of the clients they visit have suffered injury themselves, and Scraps brings hope, comfort and joy to everyone he meets. Seeing Scraps navigate easily and confidently on three legs gives the residents motivation to get through their own rehab. One resident said, “Scraps inspires me. If he can get around on three legs then I can do it on my own two.” Another resident who enjoys visits from Scraps keeps his picture in her room and when she’s having a “down day” she looks to Scraps for the inspiration she needs to keep moving forward.

Lynn Peters & Tucker
Cross Junction, VA

“How you met Dick yet? He is going to be so excited!” The Director of the facility led the team to Dick’s room. Dick shared a love for Goldens; his room was full of golden retriever pictures, calendars, small statues, etc. “You would have thought he hit the lottery when we walked into the room,” handler Lynn Peters recounts. As the team got to know Dick they learned that he and his wife had Golden Retrievers but had to give them up when they entered the nursing home. When Tucker and Lynn would leave after any given visit they could hear Dick saying, “Bye Tucker” all the way down the hallway.

As Dick’s health declined the team continued to visit. When Dick was in bed and could not open his eyes he would reach out for Tucker and quietly pet him. After Dick passed away the team was invited to his funeral by a family friend. Lynn was concerned that Tucker would be a distraction in church but he sat quietly next to the pew seeming to understand what was required of him, almost as if knowing that it was time to say goodbye to a very special friend.
Midwest

Chris Wolf & Posey
Painesville, OH

It was obvious from the beginning that Posey was a natural for therapy work. At her first veterinary exam, the veterinarian said that not only was she the calmest Miniature Schnauzer, but also the calmest terrier she had ever met. Posey is now eight years old and has been doing therapy work with her handler Chris Wolf since she was 18 months old. She has worked in high schools, special needs schools and at the Salvation Army.

Posey is a “best seller” among the students. One particular boy was ten years old but reading at only a second grade level. When he first met Posey he was scared to sit next to her because he was afraid of dogs. At the end of the first session he pushed her a treat across the room to her. Over many visits he began to place the treats even closer to Posey before eventually giving her the treat directly. Now that same boy wants to rescue a dog of his own and happily reads right next to Posey during their visits.

Wendy Beach & Stanley
Marquette, MI

Hundreds of students flooded into the Northern Michigan University library to spend time with therapy dogs during finals week. The evening was full of smiles, hugs, laughter and conversations about studies, tests and how much students were missing their pets at home. Two young students in particular were so touched by Wendy’s visit with Stanley they shared with her their interest in social work and their decision to look into broadening that focus to include the study of animal-assisted interventions.

“I sometimes start wondering what my purpose in life is on a big picture scale,” said Wendy. “Well... thank you Pet Partners, I really joined for Stanley because I knew he wanted a job, but he gave me a job too, and it’s bringing smiles everywhere. It’s a mutual circle of helping going on.”

Ronica Froese & Charlie
Newaygo, MI

Handler Ronica Froese has four brothers who have all served their country in the armed forces. Being able to work with veterans is a true passion for her. Being able to bring joy to veterans is a true gift for Ronica. On one visit they walked into a room and a resident veteran named Robert saw them and immediately put his hands up and gestured for the team to come over to him. The song “Go Tell It on the Mountain” was playing.

Ronica brought Charlie up to him and Robert was singing their praises. She watched as their faces were inches apart and could see the joy they both had. Charlie’s ears were forward and he was listening intently. It was a very tearful moment for Ronica.

“Charlie truly adores Robert’s singing and I know everyone that sees the two together gets the same heartwarming feeling that I do.”

David and Heidi
Ennenga & Runty
Cokato, MN

Runty’s first visit as a therapy dog would be the most important of her career, saying goodbye to her master. Before falling ill, David had started training Runty to become a therapy dog. He knew she would be the perfect dog for the job and wanted to see her bring joy to others in the community. After being diagnosed with stage four pancreatic cancer, David expressed to his daughter Heidi his regret in not being able to complete Runty’s training. Her father was soon spending much time in the hospital and so Heidi Ennenga began to train with Runty to make her father’s dream come true.

“Little did Runty and I know that October 4th would be our first and most important visit as a Pet Partners Therapy Team,” stated Heidi. When they arrived, Runty gently hopped onto her dad’s bed and laid there with him holding her paw. Runty did not want to leave his side. In his last few days David was able to see his dream for Runty come to fruition. Days after that first visit Heidi’s father passed away with Runty by his side.
Jennifer Smith, Gunnar Johnson & Bunny Besties
Wayzata, MN

After learning that 90% of homeless children have never owned a book, Jennifer Smith and her son Gunnar Johnson knew exactly where their registered therapy rabbits could make an impact.

“Our kids gain useful life skills during every visit with the bunnies, especially when it comes to trust and peacefulness,” states Elizabeth Machart of People Serving People (PSP). PSP is a shelter located in Minneapolis, Minnesota that serves approximately 400 homeless people per night. The average age of children staying there is five.

PSP was happy to report that after the first visit of reading with the “Bunny Besties” all the children were very enthusiastic about reading. “The bunnies have been an amazing addition to our programs, not only building literacy skills by encouraging interactive reading and practice, but empathy skills as well” says Bailey Erickson, Education Services Coordinator. “The children are so gentle with the bunnies and form close bonds with them. They are excited when the bunnies come to read with them and anxious for them to return.”

Southeast

Nanette & Natasha Holt- Mini Blessings Ministries
Alachua, FL

When Cinnabon was visiting children in between chemo treatments in an outdoor area of the hospital, teens in the behavioral unit were watching from a window with their noses pressed against the glass trying to get a glimpse of the mini-horse in action. A nurse asked if the team could move further down the sidewalk so the patients from the window could get a better view. Handler Natasha and her mother Nanette Holt noticed a small fenced in area by the unit and with the permission of the nurse moved into it. This area was sectioned off for the safety of the patients who were staying in the unit, but hands eagerly reached through to feel Cinnabon’s muzzle. One of the voices asked the young handler why she would bring her horse to visit strangers, and she responded that she had once been a patient there herself. “So you’re just like us,” a young man replied.

Natasha had suffered life threatening injuries from a horse accident and had been a patient at the hospital. She guided Cinnabon’s muzzle closer to the teens. Pushing back tears, one of the patients said “We thought nobody cared about us,” and another urged, “Promise you’ll try to come see us again?” Another girl said “I’m crying tears of joy. I feel like I have a purpose now. I want to have therapy animals, too!”

The team has since been granted permission to visit the behavioral unit with fellow mini horse teams.

West

George Sallee & Simon
Snohomish, WA

When George and Simon began visiting a young girl suffering severe injuries from a car accident, their interactions quickly became the highlight of her week. Sometime later, the young girl tragically passed but the family wanted one last visit and invited George and Simon to her wake as their visits had meant so much to their daughter. A thank you card from the mother read, “Simon you are very special and I am glad you were a part of her life.”

“I never would have imagined how much this work would enrich my life,” says George Sallee, Simon’s handler. After just one year and over 200 visits, the team has made a significant impact in their community - whether it is at the senior living facility they visit, the rehab center, or at the elementary school. An abundance of cards from the students are received. “Thank you for giving us this amazing opportunity. Someday I am going to be a therapy dog owner!” said one and, “Simon is a dog who listens to kids while they read because it makes kids feel better than reading to adults.” With George’s and Simon’s help the teachers at Maltby Elementary school are seeing their students’ reading skill level steadily improve and children who once never read aloud to the class are excited to do so because of Simon.
Pet Partners announces new partnership with American Pet Nutrition

We are proud to announce a new relationship with American Pet Nutrition (APN), makers of Vita Bone® treats, Supreme Source™ grain-free dog and cat food and many other high quality pet food and treat products. APN will support Pet Partners as a corporate sponsor, helping to bring the healing power of pets to people in need.

“All of us at American Pet Nutrition have dedicated our careers to the health and happiness of all pets because we know what joy they can bring,” says Bill Behnken, president, American Nutrition, Inc. “that’s why we’re so excited to be a part of the great work that Pet Partners is doing. We know that their therapy teams are changing lives every day.”

APN and Pet Partners share the belief that the relationship between human and animal is a meaningful connection that enhances the lives of both owner and pet.

“We are excited to have the support of American Pet Nutrition and look forward to their assistance with our efforts to educate, demonstrate and advocate animal-assisted therapy, activities and education,” says Traci Pryor, senior director, national strategic partnerships, Pet Partners.

PetSmart Welcomes Pet Partners to Arizona Headquarters

In November our generous partner PetSmart hosted several Arizona Pet Partners teams at their Phoenix headquarters for an interactive lunch and learn session. PetSmart associates who are interested in volunteering had the chance to hear from passionate handlers and meet some amazing therapy animals. The session was led by Carol McDaniels, a current Pet Partners handler, instructor and evaluator who volunteers regularly at The Mayo Clinic in Arizona’s pediatric oncology department with her Doberman Mia. Thank you PetSmart for your continued support of our mission.

Thank You Rover.com

Rover.com, the nation’s largest network of dog sitters and dog walkers donated $1 to Pet Partners for everyone who booked a stay over the holidays. We are incredibly grateful for this generous donation of more than $25,000.

“Rover exists so that everyone can experience the joy of having a dog in their life,” said Brent Turner, Rover’s chief operating officer. “By supporting Pet Partners this holiday season, our community of dog lovers helped therapy animals nationwide get one step closer to improving the lives of their human companions.”

Our thanks to Spectrum Brands

Spectrum Brands, providers of quality pet products from brands such as Nature’s Miracle, FURminator, Dingo and Tetra, made an incredibly generous matching gift to Pet Partners this holiday season.

For every $1 that you donated, they pledged to match the gift dollar to dollar up to $25,000 doubling the impact of your gift. Such was the success of the campaign that they went on to increase the match by another $10,000 - making a total of $35,000!

Spectrum Brands has a wide range of products for all types of pet owners – from food to litter solutions, grooming solutions to bedding.

PetCare Division

President and CEO, Annie Magnant said, “Partners like Spectrum Brands make a big difference to our fundraising efforts. Their offer to match gifts from our supporters will help us develop new programs in 2016 and keep the costs of registrations down. We are grateful to our supporters who donated and helped to make double the impact. So the next time you are looking for quality pet products, check out Spectrum Brands to say thanks.”
Why can’t my animal wear a costume when we go to work?

This is a great question and one that we get asked from time to time, so it is a perfect way to start our letters page! The real magic on a visit happens because of the connection made between human and animal at a very deep, even physiological level. In fact, research demonstrates that animal assisted interventions cause the release of oxytocin (the hormone released when we bond).

These interventions have a much more significant impact than raising a smile because of a cute outfit. When you are on a visit, you are participating in the incredible exchange that can take place wordlessly between your animal and the person they are spending time with. While the effect is not intentional, a costume can actually detract or create a barrier from the most important part of the bond – the touch.

Costumes also have the potential to interfere with your responsibilities as a handler. You have already pledged to Be Your Animals’ Best Advocate. To ensure the animal’s well-being, you should be able to read your animal’s distress signals at all times. Although very cute, a costume can interfere with these visual cues that are an important part of the communication between you and your animal. Also consider that costumes may have unintended infection control challenges, a key consideration for many facilities.

This principle of the natural benefit of the human-animal bond was at the heart of our founders’ belief and is one that lives on to this day. All we ask is that when “at work” we are dressed for it professionally. Play time however, is absolutely yours!

How long does it take to process my registration/renewal?

Our Operations department is showing steadily increasing improvements in processing times as the process is now widely adopted by volunteers. Processing times run on average between 7-10 business days. Although documents are submitted electronically, all items are reviewed by an individual person, to ensure that the rigorous standards of our national program are consistently met.

The number one reason for delays is if the evaluation score sheet is missing all six pages of the score sheets. These have to be added to the registration for review. It is also important to remember that all registration materials must be submitted within 90 days of the evaluation date, in line with our policy. It is rare that the time window isn’t met – but it is good to keep this in mind. We are always looking at ways to speed thing up and get our volunteers out into the community, doing what they do best!

I recently joined Pet Partners – what’s the best way to start visiting?

Welcome! There are a host of resources available to you all within the volunteer center. You can search for community partners who are our local groups of Pet Partners teams affiliated with our national organization in order to meet other volunteers in your area. Our community partners and established volunteers can be a wonderful source of mentorship as you start this journey.

Looking to get started with a volunteer opportunity? We have a Find a Volunteer Opportunity search available in the Volunteer Center for you to browse. You can also approach facilities yourself. Within the resources we have templates that can be used to help you approach a new facility. Where possible it is always good to speak to other volunteers who will have a wealth of experience that can guide you. From our headquarters, whenever we have a new facility that wants to start visits, we email that area with the contact details. Keep a look out for those emails!
Taking a Personal and Future Approach to Giving

We hope you have enjoyed reading the articles in Interactions. It is evident that Pet Partners is uniquely positioned to provide caring and uplifting visits to people in need by our dedicated handlers and their loving therapy animals. In addition, Pet Partners continues to ignite interest by those who are exploring and sharing the importance of health benefits through the human-animal bond. All this is made possible through the generosity of our supporters.

One way to continue to support the mission of Pet Partners is to consider a gift after your lifetime that is both flexible and versatile. Plus, an added feature is that these gifts may help reduce your income taxes or estate taxes. Are you curious to learn more? Read on to discover if there is a viable option for you!

• **Many people consider a future gift in their wills or a living trust to be an easy way to support Pet Partners.** You won’t be using assets today and you can also direct that Pet Partners will receive a percentage amount or a specific amount through your will.

• **A gift through Life Insurance:** if the purpose of your life insurance is outdated or if you have a current policy through your employer, naming Pet Partners as a beneficiary is simple. Changing the beneficiary designation requires minimal time and paperwork. You can still support your heirs or other loved ones by designating that Pet Partners receive a percentage of the policy.

• **Because a retirement plan gift or an inherited IRA will be heavily taxed to a non charitable entity,** you may want to consider leaving these assets through your estate plan to a nonprofit like Pet Partners, which will not be taxed.

The gifts we receive may range from a few thousand dollars to very considerable sums with each being treated with great respect and sensitivity. Pet Partners wants to thank those who have taken the step to include Pet Partners in their estate plan. We would be honored to include these individuals in our Caring Community.

**Good news for who use their IRA to make outright donations to a non-profit.** The IRA charitable rollover which allows taxpayers 70 1/2 and older to make tax-free charitable gifts of up to $100,000 per year, directly from the Individual Retirement Accounts to eligible charities like Pet Partners is now a permanent part of the tax code. Although some people wait until the end of the calendar year to take a required minimum distribution, it’s nice to plan early!

Consult your financial advisor or a professional to understand if one of these opportunities makes smart sense for your personal situation.

**Do you have questions?** Contact Mary Bohmke, 425-679-5502, or email us at legacy@petpartners.org. The legal name is Pet Partners 875 124th Avenue NE, Suite #101, Bellevue, WA 98005 and the federal tax ID is 91-1158281
April 30th is National Therapy Animal Day.


Visit www.petpartners.org while stocks last!

This promotion is a time limited offer and will close on April 9, 2016.