

Pet Partners

I N T E R A C T I O N S M A G A Z I N E

STORIES OF LIVES IMPROVED BY POSITIVE HUMAN-ANIMAL INTERACTIONS.

Pet Partners Goes Global: International Expansion

- *Emerging Research on Therapy Dogs:
How Do We Measure Whether
They “Work”?.....pg. 9*
- *Pet Partners Welcomes New National
Field Relations Directors.....pg. 12*
- *World’s Largest Pet Walk.....pg. 13*





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PUBLICATION CREDITS:

Editor: Elisabeth Van Every

Contributors: Mary Bohmke, Teresa Cueto Vigil, Steve Dale, Linda Dicus, Brandon Fuller, Jesse Haas, Taylor Johnson, PhD, Brynna Morgan, George Mosoia, Annie Peters, Traci Pryor, Kerri Rodriguez, Tedd Rosenfeld, Elisabeth Van Every, Jackie Vasquez-Theodorakis

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Cover Photo: Team evaluator candidate working with team at South Korea practicum.

Photo courtesy of Lisa Zeiner

Pet Partners
425.679.5500
www.petpartners.org



A Letter from the President & CEO Annie Peters

As I enter my fifth year with this wonderful organization, I now write this bi-annual column with many of you personally in mind. When I travel for Pet Partners I get to meet more of you in person, see photos of your wonderful partners (and sometimes get to meet them in the fur, hair, or feathers), and see firsthand the passion you have for the work you do. You inspire me. You also fill me with possibilities of so much more we can and should be doing. Therapy animal visits are increasingly being recognized for the positive impact they have, expanding the opportunities for the impact of the human-animal bond; but with opportunity, and as the leader in the field, comes great responsibility. We take our responsibility as your staff at the national office seriously.

Recently Jackie Vasquez-Theodorakis, one of our new National Directors, Field Relations, shared a post with me written by a thought leader in the field of non-profits, Richard Anthony Tagle. He argues that as a sector, we need to stop letting ourselves be defined by a label assigned by the IRS. In speaking about charitable organizations, he wrote, "We are a business. We need capital, we have staff, we train them, we have policies and procedures, we have boards. [...] We also invest in marketing, communications, and research. We are a business."

To our donors and volunteers, I say: We're in the business of supporting some of the most passionate volunteers alive in sharing their amazing companion animals to bring comfort to a dog lover in

hospice, help a struggling reader gain proficiency, or lower stress for students at semester finals. We educate the human end of the leash to lower risk, and sometimes we must enforce policy or address infractions to protect our ability to provide such wonderful volunteers with insurance for visits. And we're now also in the business of helping to pass legislation where human health is positively impacted by the human-animal bond.

There is so much more we want to do; so much more we *must* do. In the year ahead, we'll be providing education for handlers who are increasingly called on after a tragedy like a school shooting. We will invest in measuring outcomes of our Therapy Animal Program so that we can report more detailed and critical information about the impact of therapy animals to healthcare and policy decision makers. We will be exploring the education needs of professionals who wish to integrate their own companion animals into their practice. And we'll amplify the discussion about the importance of therapy animal standards. We'll also continue to have fun, with National Therapy Animal Day™ and the World's Largest Pet Walk™ celebrating the creative and energetic sides to our mission. Then we'll pull everything we do together for a conference in San Antonio in September 2019.

When I started with Pet Partners, someone commented that we had allowed ourselves to be thought of as the driver's license bureau: a place you



reluctantly went every two years to renew. We want to be more than that, and are moving forward with our intent to make Pet Partners a vital and enjoyable part of the activities of our volunteers, partners, communities, and donors. Many of you already recognize and comment on the changes that have been undertaken, and we're excited to have you with us as we go forward. We're just getting started! And like any successful business, we recognize the importance of branding. If you chat with me over the next year, you'll likely get an earful about Pet Partners looking the same no matter where you go: the importance of a prospective handler being able to find Pet Partners in their community, the importance of being taken

seriously by decision-makers, and the leaps and bounds animal-assisted interventions can make when Pet Partners is a household name.

Sure, the IRS will continue to classify us as a non-profit, but we know that we're in an important business: the business of safely and effectively bringing the human-animal bond to everyone who can benefit. To our handlers, every time you grace someone's presence with the non-judgmental love of a registered therapy animal, you and your pet are making the world a better place. To our donors and investors, thank you for allowing us to address needs, support our volunteers, and lead the way. We look forward to reporting back to you.

International Expansion

The Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program is exploring new opportunities in an international pilot program

Pet Partners has been an internationally-known organization throughout our history, including participation in the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations (IAHAIO) and the International Society for Anthrozoology (ISAZ). But the heart of our mission, the Therapy Animal Program, was focused in the United States until very recently. We knew anecdotally that there was interest in other countries in our mission and principles, including the benefits of the human-animal bond, standards for animal-assisted interventions, and support for animal welfare. What we didn't know was whether the opportunity was there to expand the Therapy Animal Program into other countries.

In late 2016, Pet Partners received a grant to explore the possibility of expanding Pet Partners internationally. Our first step was to determine whether there was demand for and interest in Pet Partners in other countries. To answer these questions, we surveyed professionals in the field, as well as other stakeholders, and the resounding response was "Yes!" It was clear from those surveys and interviews that our handler education, rigorous evaluation procedures, and ongoing support for volunteers were all valuable on a global scale.

The next step was to consider how an international program would be structured. Therapy Animal Program staff conducted extensive discussion and testing to determine what elements of the domestic program would

be used and what would need to be modified. Some changes were made, primarily in limiting international teams to only dogs at launch and simplifying the team qualification ratings. Also, international teams do not currently receive coverage under Pet Partners insurance.

Because Pet Partners team evaluators are required for establishing the Therapy Animal Program, the international program launched by offering team evaluator practicums (trainings) in 2017. There was little issue recruiting evaluators—many candidates for that role know Pet Partners and have interacted with us through professional organizations or in other ways. This gave us several opportunities to plan and schedule practicums for international candidates.

The first international Pet Partners practicum was held in California in conjunction with the 2017 IAHAIO conference. Shortly after this the first international in-country practicums and team evaluations were conducted in Colombia and South Korea. These were followed in 2018 by evaluator trainings in Switzerland and Australia, and a practicum was held in Minneapolis in conjunction with the 2018 Animal Assisted Intervention International (AAII) conference.

Lisa Zeiner, Pet Partners staff Evaluator/Instructor Support Specialist, conducted the South Korea and Switzerland events. Lisa has been associated with the organization since it was Delta Society, as a therapy



Colombian team evaluator Nicolas Garcia evaluates team Tere & Rex

animal handler for multiple species, team evaluator, and volunteer instructor, all of which was invaluable experience when she joined the Pet Partners staff. She's had the opportunity to watch the organization evolve and grow, and being part of the international pilot has been very rewarding for her. "What stood out was how much the international candidates knew about Delta Society, our history, and our place in creating this field. It was very heartwarming to hear them speak so knowledgeably about us," she says.

An experience in South Korea was especially meaningful for Lisa. "When I walked into the room it was all set up with cones and tape and looked like any evaluation in the U.S. I felt like I was going to cry and said how I wish Bill [McCulloch] were here to see this," Lisa recalls. "We are doing a team evaluation in Seoul, we are working not only toward therapy animal teams, but especially here in Seoul, what we do also aids the cause of animal welfare. It does not get any better than that."

Tedd Rosenfeld, Pet Partners volunteer handler and team



The Pet Partners international expansion program is made possible through our relationship with Elanco Animal Health, with funds provided by Eli Lilly and Company Foundation. Beyond their generous financial support of the program, Elanco has connected us with individuals in the animal health industry across the globe so Pet Partners can find success in each new country we expand into. Elanco employees also raised awareness of therapy animal work during the Elanco Global Day of Service by participating in the first annual World's Largest Pet Walk. Thank you, Elanco employees!



Pet Partners staff and team evaluator candidates at the Switzerland practicum

evaluator, is serving as a Pet Partners International Program Educator, bringing his experience to help prepare prospective international volunteers. For him, working with international candidates has been illuminating and deeply fulfilling. “With the international practicums I noticed a great amount

of positive interaction and networking amongst the multi-national candidates in the practicums,” he says. “Everyone was truly pulling for the others to be successful. Our question and answer sessions brought out excellent ideas and solutions. Pet Partners has registered a group of international team

evaluators who are very accomplished in their fields. All are already successfully utilizing dogs in their programs and practices. They chose to affiliate with Pet Partners because it is the gold standard in the field of AAI.”

Discussion with international candidates has provided insight into how AAI is viewed in other countries. The United States is the most progressive in incorporating dogs into

hospitals. In other nations, the use of dogs in hospital settings is still in its infancy, but dogs are used for many other important roles in private practice, social services, and education.

- In Bucharest, Romania, Victor Chitic, a PhD in Psychology, incorporates the dogs in his treatment of special needs children at a therapy research center. Along with his therapy

Pet Partners in Canada

As Pet Partners has introduced our Therapy Animal Program to other continents, we’ve also made a return journey across the northern border of the U.S. Pet Partners had a small presence in Canada in the past, but the numbers of registered teams dwindled over the years due to lack of local team evaluators. In 2018 we made a commitment to increasing our presence in Canada, and conducted a practicum and a team evaluation in Toronto in June. Several new Canadian therapy animal teams have since registered with Pet Partners.

Pet Partners teams in Canada are considered part of the domestic Therapy Animal Program, following the same procedures and policies as teams in the United States.

Additional practicums are being held in other areas of Canada in the coming months. We look forward to registering more Pet Partners teams in Canada to represent our Therapy Animal Program and demonstrate the power of the human-animal bond for our northern neighbors.



Team evaluator candidate Claudia Mueller works with a team at the Switzerland practicum

work, Victor and his teams also visit retirement facilities and schools.

- In Hong Kong, Debbie Ngai, social worker and counselor, uses her poodle in an AAI role to work with students for issues including ADHD, autism, and dyslexia. Debbie founded the Hong Kong Animal Assisted Therapy Association and has spoken at conferences about the

benefits and effectiveness of animal-assisted therapy.

- In Buenos Aires, Argentina, Mercedes Iacoviello is a lead in an initiative named Proyecto Salta Violeta, to promote responsible dog ownership through dog-assisted interventions in schools and other institutions. Her driving interest is to professionalize AAI in her country.

In Their Own Words: The Dream of Being a Pet Partner

Handler and Team Evaluator Teresa Cueto Vigil



I started doing animal-assisted therapy 6 years ago with my dog Rex. I found out about AAI when I was looking for things I could do to share my time with my dog and serve others. That road started with some short courses in Colombia, books that I bought online and read, and many videos. I took an online course from Pet Partners (at the time, called Delta Society), but the next step for registration required me to travel with my dog, and that wasn't possible. I then got a new dog, a golden retriever named Molly. Molly was trained by me, she loves people, she has lots of energy, and we enjoy the work. I have volunteered with Molly in many settings, like working with children recovering from abuse, people with developmental disabilities, and schoolchildren.

In 2017 Nicolas Garcia, who also became a Pet Partners team and evaluator, asked me if I would like to become a Pet Partner. I told him about my online course seven years ago, and accepted immediately. I love all Pet Partners philosophies, rules, and care about the well-being of the animals. I agree with PETS and YAYABA 100%!

I became a team for Pet Partners with Molly.

I plan to visit a geriatric home that my family has helped with before. There also is a foster home that I would like to visit. I understand that the Pet Partners teams in Colombia have some plans with the Red Cross too.

Sharing my dog with others allows me to give back. It gives me so much satisfaction to volunteer. I look forward to our visits. I always dream for the next one to come, so we can bring smiles to others.

-Tere, International Therapy Animal Handler with Molly and Team Evaluator in Bogotá, Colombia



Lisa Zeiner gives instructions to team evaluator candidates at the South Korea practicum

As of this writing, Pet Partners has licensed team evaluators and registered handlers in

- Argentina
- Australia
- Colombia
- France
- Hong Kong
- India
- Japan
- Poland
- Romania
- South Korea
- Spain
- Switzerland

We also have registered handlers in Italy and Mexico.

We're gratified to have established a presence in all these nations in just two years. And we're looking forward to further expansion,

including the possibility of incorporating other species into the international program and extending insurance coverage to international volunteers, as well as more dedicated focus on engaging with international handlers.

"We have a great deal of work ahead of us, as we collaborate to better understand AAI in such diverse contexts. There is so much to learn from our global volunteers," says Jesse Haas, Therapy Animal Program Director and international lead. "But I've also never been more sure that our experience, education, and standards are an asset everywhere. There should be no boundaries or borders on safe and effective therapy animal visits."



Prospective volunteers in Colombia work on their Pet Partners coursework

In Their Own Words: An Interview with George Mosoia, Team Evaluator, Romania

What made you decide to register with Pet Partners?

I have been active in the AAI field from 2012, establishing an NGO, and I knew I wanted to do more. It was challenging to start the NGO in a country with no legislation regarding AAI and therapy dogs. Moreover, the popular beliefs and attitude towards dogs were very negative, making my mission even harder. Lastly, there were people and organizations in the country working with poorly trained or even unfit dogs. It was in this context when I decided that ethics and work standards need to be implemented on a larger scale in Romania in order to protect both clients and therapy teams. Pet Partners was the perfect choice due to the organization's expertise and education opportunities offered in the AAI field. I have always admired the pioneering work of Pet Partners and when the opportunity came along I knew that it would be a great step for the human-animal interaction field in Romania. I feel honored to be the first Romanian team evaluator and to bring to Romania the Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program.

What is your background in animal-assisted interventions?

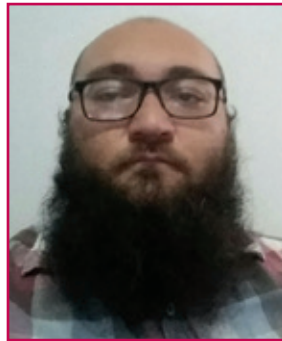
I work as a dog handler, I coordinate the therapy department in my organization and also train new professionals. My work expertise includes animal-assisted programs for clients with different diagnoses and animal-assisted activities: visits in schools, kindergartens, companies, and such. Through the organization I coordinate we have established the first center in Romania which

offers integrated services (AAI programs, training, research and education programs for the community), and also implemented pilot programs in Romania such as reading with dogs, stress relief programs for students, and the first AAT program in a state hospital. I am also interested in the scientific part of AAI, presenting research papers at conferences, courses at the Universities we collaborate with and at the Romanian Academy.

In 2013 I established an organization called Dog Assist Association. Our goal is to promote AAI and its benefits to the entire community. We have established partnerships with academic, canine, and social services stakeholders.

Could you share a story about your experience with AAI?

Every client I work with is a new experience for me for which I am grateful. It's been a rocky road sometimes, but the changes I see in my clients motivate me to continue. Maybe one of my dearest stories is that of a little boy. He was two years old when we first met, and the diagnosis was of autism. He did not speak, did not comply with any requests, and had a lot of stereotypes such as [repeatedly] opening and closing doors. A psychologist specializing in behavioral therapy and myself and my therapy dog Bes started working with him, and after a few months things started to change. Parents told us we have given their child back, while the teachers described the little boy as a whole



different child. After four years, he is still in therapy, but he is integrated in a state kindergarten and we are proud to see an independent, sociable little boy.

How will being part of Pet Partners benefit your country?

First, through my work as a Pet Partners international team evaluator I wish to offer those interested in this work a framework towards proper education, support, and professional knowledge for AAI programs. I am interested in promoting and implementing

correct standards of practice and this is exactly what the team evaluator position represents. Second, I wish to further work towards making AAI programs known and more available in my country, because the benefits are huge. Third, I want to change the community's perception towards dogs, using Pet Partners expertise and programs. Fourth, but not least, I want to promote a respectful way of working for AAI teams, making sure that both clients and therapy dogs are well taken care of and respected. And this is what Pet Partners principles promote.

This interview was edited for length and clarity.

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Happy Holidays Begin with Happy Pets

By Steve Dale

Sponsored by:



When the house fills up with guests for the holidays, pets often receive a lot of attention, sometimes in the form of table scraps. Before Aunt Sally and Uncle Bob give your pet that extra turkey bone or bread roll, it's important to consider the dangers that can come with feeding your pet human food. Dogs are known to visit the pet ER the day after a holiday with painful and potentially even life-threatening pancreatitis or gastrointestinal obstruction because they got a little too much food from the dinner table or managed to swallow the full turkey bone.

Instead of leaving pets to roam around the holiday dining area eating potentially dangerous items, feed your

pup in a far-off room and behind a closed door. To ensure Fido doesn't miss out on the traditional holiday meal, give him the next best thing to a turkey dinner: Vita Bone® Artisan Inspired® Biscuits, which come in Turkey Stuffing & Cranberry flavor and are perfect for the holiday season. Stuff a few of these biscuits into food puzzle toys (available online and at any pet store), and your dog will be busy while your guests enjoy their meal.

Socializing is another big part of holiday festivities. Some dogs are social butterflies, who enjoy all the relatives—maybe even more than you do. But not all dogs are fans of crowds. When the doorbell is repeatedly ringing and strangers are entering the

home, some dogs become worried or anxious. The best favor you can do for a dog who finds big gatherings stressful is to place your pup in a secluded room, so your visitors aren't repeatedly barked at and your dog can have a chance to calm her frazzled canine nerves.

With all your guests coming and going, there is also a higher chance your dog could escape, whether they want to run away or simply play outside. Either way, that's not what any pet caretaker wants to deal with. One way to keep your dog away from the door is to place him in a secluded room, turn up the stereo, and play Spotify's calming music for dogs, or check out any number of other sites, including www.icalmpet.com

Typically, you know in advance when you will be hosting a crowd. Several days before the event, plug in an Adaptil pheromone diffuser in the sanctuary room. Mother dogs deliver a calming pheromone in their milk when they

nurse and Adaptil is a copy of that pheromone. This is a natural way to lower your pet's anxiety. Still, if your dog continues to be nervous about all those visitors, speak with your veterinarian about a nutritional supplement such as Zylkene or Zentrol, or even a prescription for a pharmaceutical anti-anxiety medication.

Because of the new "Fear Free" initiative in veterinary medicine, designed to prevent and alleviate fear in our pets, we know periodic distress and anxiety is normal. But when our pets feel it chronically or even for hours at a time, if there's a better option, that better option makes sense.

This holiday season, don't forget about your pets. Keeping them away from table scraps and loud noise that might startle them is a great start to providing them a safe, fun holiday. After all, our best friends deserve a good holiday too!





RESEARCH FOCUS

Research is critical to the Pet Partners mission. Peer-reviewed evidence on the benefits of animal-assisted interventions and the requirements for safe and effective therapy animal visits is a foundation of our Therapy Animal Program. We're grateful to all the researchers, scholars, and study participants who provide the data that makes our work possible. We look forward to working with more professionals in the field to further expand the body of research on AAI.

Emerging Research on Therapy Dogs: How Do We Measure Whether They “Work”?

For decades, therapy dogs have wagged tails and warmed hearts across thousands of residential, medical, and mental health facilities across the world. More than 9300 therapy dog teams are registered with Pet Partners, a number that continues to grow each year. Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) and animal-assisted activities (AAA) are no longer a rarity in healthcare, but increasingly a norm. Anecdotes suggest that patients, parents, and providers alike tend to rate therapy dog visits as positive

and rewarding experiences for all involved. However, as the roles for therapy dogs and other therapy animals continue to expand, so does the demand for empirical research on their efficacy. So, how do we measure whether therapy dogs are actually having an effect?

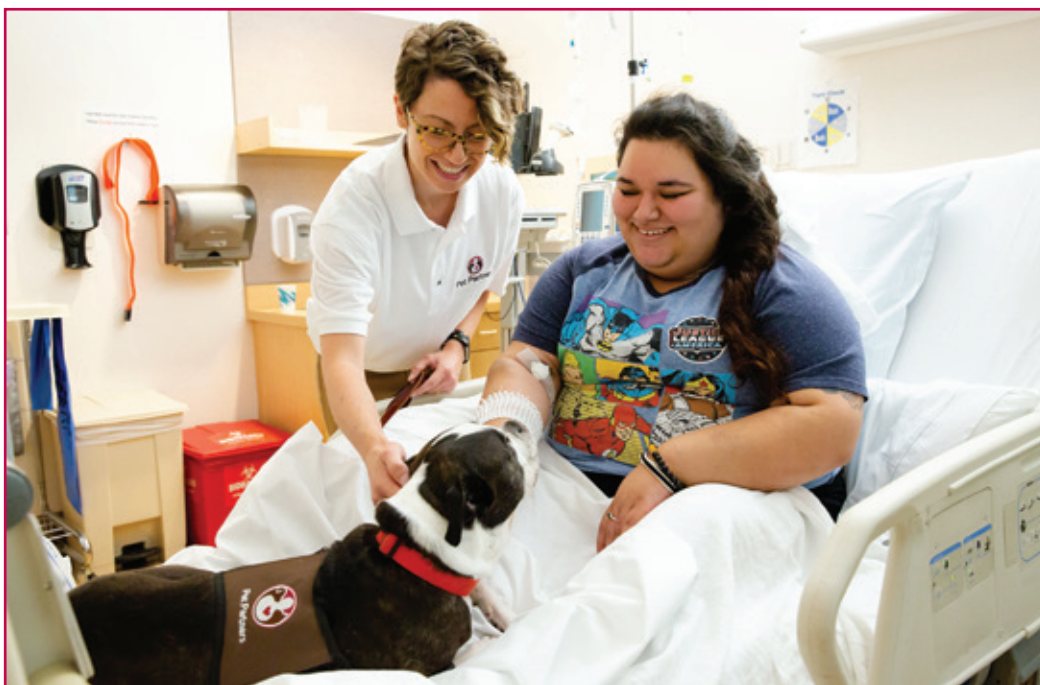
Researchers studying therapy dogs often measure outcomes in three main ways: surveys, physiology, and behavior. Surveys are crucial for understanding internal experiences such as pain, fear, or happiness. On

the other hand, physiological and medical outcomes such as heart rate, blood pressure, or stress hormones can offer reliable measurement of a patient's physical state. Finally, for individuals who may not be able to take a survey (such as young children), filming or observing their behavior during a therapy dog interaction can also be useful for measuring visible outcomes like smiling or laughing.

Surveys are by far the most common measurement in AAT research since they are

fast, low-cost, and easy to use. Surveys can measure not only psychological changes as a result of AAT or AAA (e.g., pain or mood) but also patients' satisfaction with the dog. Surveys do not have to be lengthy or bulky to be used in research. For example, a common way to measure pain in children is the Wong-Baker FACES scale of cartoon faces with varying expressions ranging from “no hurt” to “hurts worst.” By asking children to point to the face that they are experiencing before and after a therapy dog visit, we can directly measure the effect of the visit on their internal state. With new technology, many surveys can also be administered through apps on tablets, laptops, or mobile phones to reduce paper-and-pencil burden and provide fast and automated scoring of results.

To supplement surveys, physiological measures can also provide valuable measurement from therapy dog interaction. In hospitals, bedside monitoring can be useful to track things like heart rate and blood pressure. For example, a 2007 study by Chubak and colleagues assigned 76 patients with advanced heart failure to receive a 12-minute visit with a therapy dog, a friendly human, or no visit at all. They found that compared to control groups, patients who received a visit from a therapy dog not only self-reported lower anxiety, but had lower blood pressure both during and after the sessions. In addition, by taking periodic blood samples from the patient's existing catheter, researchers were able to see subtle decreases in stress hormones during



continued on page 10



**PARTNER
SPOTLIGHT**

Pet Partners Receives BETTER CITIES FOR PETS™ Grant to Increase Presence of Therapy Animals in Richmond, VA



Pet Partners is very grateful for our recent selection by the United States Conference of Mayors and Mars Petcare as recipient of a generous grant to increase the number of therapy animal teams in Richmond, Virginia.

The grant was awarded through the U.S. Conference of Mayors and Mars Petcare's BETTER CITIES FOR PETS grant program, a nationwide initiative designed to help communities implement, support, and expand pet-friendly programs and policies.

Margaret Popik recently joined Pet Partners as the Community Development Coordinator for this project. Although new to the staff of Pet Partners, Margaret and her dog Elsa have been a registered Pet Partners team in the Richmond area since 2016. They frequently volunteer together at the VCU Medical Center, visiting both adult and pediatric units.

Margaret will lead community outreach and expansion efforts, partnering with area trainers, veterinarians, facilities, and members of the local Community Partner group, Pet Partners of Greater Richmond. "I am very excited to focus on increasing the number of Pet Partners teams in Richmond," said Margaret. "These teams are so critical for improving human health and well-being. We want more people in the Richmond area to experience the incredible power of the human-animal bond firsthand!"

continued from page 9

Emerging Research on Therapy Dogs...

the interaction. In this way, there is stronger evidence for the lower self-reported anxiety than if the survey was used alone. Other AAT studies have also made use of new technology such as wearable wristbands to measure a participant's heart rate or stress. Emerging developments in saliva measurement have also provided researchers with an easy and noninvasive way to measure stress hormones without taking blood samples.

Observing behavior is widely used in AAT research, especially for patients who are nonverbal or cognitively impaired. For example, observation of elderly individuals with dementia before, during, and after therapy dog visits has found

evidence of decreased aggression and improved social interaction from the visit. In another example, a 2002 study by Martin & Farnum observed children with autism during an AAT session and found that a therapy dog increased social behavior and promoted a more playful mood among the children. Behavior observation can even be used to measure aspects of dog visits that may be important to explaining the effect of these visits, such as percent of time spent petting or talking to the dog.

As the use of therapy dogs continues to grow, empirical research on their effectiveness will be increasingly necessary to help maximize the benefits that dogs can have on

individuals around the world. While research on AAT has received a lot of attention in recent decades, there is still a lot we don't know: How does a dog make us feel better? Who might benefit the most from a therapy dog visit? Answering these questions could lead to more funding for therapy animal programs, increased access for organizations

wanting to incorporate AAT or AAA into their practices, and a better understanding of what makes these human-animal relationships so special.

Kerri Rodriguez is a Ph.D. Candidate of Human-Animal Interaction at the Center for the Human-Animal Bond at Purdue University.

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How Pet Partners Standards Brought a Therapy Cat to Children

In 2015 Pet Partners registered handler Geryl Hawke contacted Pet Partners with a frustrating issue. Geryl had been a longtime volunteer with the Pet Pals visiting program at University Hospitals in Cleveland, OH, visiting with her dogs. Now she was registered with her cat Pearl and hoped to continue as part of Pet Pals. But University Hospitals had no cats in their volunteer corps and was reluctant to allow Geryl and Pearl to visit, citing concerns about possible client allergies and safety issues with cats in comparison to dogs. Geryl asked for our assistance in showing that a therapy cat could be just as safe and effective as a therapy dog.

Pet Partners Programs staff worked with Geryl to provide evidence of Pet Partners' standards for infection control and how our team evaluation assesses a cat's suitability for therapy animal visits. Geryl took this information to the hospital and worked with them on a plan to demonstrate how Pearl could be a vital part of their visiting program.

For the first couple of years Pearl did not visit with patients, but was allowed to attend doctors' meetings, a class for medical students highlighting the benefits of animal-assisted therapy, and visit at the library during finals week. The intent was to demonstrate that Pearl's presence had a positive effect for those who interacted with

her, and how well she and Geryl managed the visits.

Geryl also demonstrated for the hospital her grooming and infection control routines with Pearl, including regular bathing and hypoallergenic wipes, claws kept short, and sanitary wipes used on her paws, along with hand hygiene for people who visit with Pearl.

In 2017, Geryl and Pearl were given the opportunity to attend a large event. The event was held outside with a DJ, an inflatable slide, a popcorn maker, about 50 students and at least that many counselors, and five therapy dogs. "That was going above and beyond what a therapy cat should have to accept," Geryl says, but she came prepared for the challenge. "I put Pearl's carrier out so she could have a 'safe place' to go if she felt she needed it. Nothing fazed her. She walked around like she owned the place. The unknown dogs didn't faze her, she let everyone hold her, she never once went in her carrier. She even surprised me!"

With so many successful visits, Pearl clearly demonstrated that she is not an ordinary cat—she's a Pet Partners registered therapy cat. Pearl was given full visiting privileges at University Hospitals in March 2018.

Since gaining full privileges, Geryl and Pearl have been visiting Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital in Cleveland three times each month. "Pearl is a star! I knew



Pearl is right at home visiting at Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital

she was good in the beginning, but she gets better each time we visit," says Geryl. "She lays down on almost every patient's bed. There are about 140 dogs in the Pet Pals program, and one cat! Pearl is fulfilling her calling and I am enjoying sharing my wonderful cat with patients and staff to brighten their day."

Geryl and Pearl's story is a wonderful example of how important the standards of

the Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program are, and that our principle of YAYABA (You Are Your Animal's Best Advocate) applies not only to therapy animals, but also to the people who benefit from their presence: Geryl was able to demonstrate that Pearl could visit safely and that her presence has a positive effect on patients and staff at the hospital. This is the kind of outcome we strive for with all of our teams and in all visiting situations.

Pet Partners Welcomes New National Field Relations Directors

The heart of Pet Partners is the Therapy Animal Program and the dedicated therapy animal teams, team evaluators, volunteer instructors, and community-based groups that do the work of bringing therapy animals to people who can benefit. The connections our volunteers have with their local communities are crucial to the Pet Partners mission, and we recognized it was time to bring dedicated focus to local groups and provide the support they need to be successful. We're pleased to welcome our new National Directors, Field Relations to the Pet Partners staff.



Taylor Johnson, PhD

received her undergrad and master's degrees from Georgia State University, and recently completed her doctorate in research psychology from Walden University. Her dissertation research focused on coexisting instances of domestic violence and animal abuse, and how

the shared experiences impacted the human-animal bond for survivors (pets and people). Through her undergrad education in psychology and animal behavior to her graduate work to become a mental health counselor, Taylor witnessed hundreds of interactions between her therapy dogs and clients that deeply inspired her.

"From a very young age, I knew that I wanted to make a career out of doing all that I possibly could to show the world the power of the human-animal bond. When I first started dreaming about my vocational ambitions, I never would have imagined that such a perfect job would someday exist," says Taylor. "I keep having to pinch myself upon realizing that I've been afforded this opportunity to learn from and partner with people (and pets!) who are working as part of this mission all over the country, and continue to change the world by sharing the love of our pets."

Taylor's professional roles in non-profits have involved a great deal of work in establishing community partnerships and working with volunteers, and she has also served in programmatic and advisory roles in academic and professional organizations. In addition to her academic background, Taylor is also a professional dog trainer with certification through Animal Behavior College. She became a registered handler with Pet Partners in 2015 and currently volunteers with her miniature poodle Ivy.

Taylor will focus on Field Relations for the eastern U.S. and Canada. In addition to her field relations responsibilities, Taylor will be working to promote research, program outcomes, and services for Pet Partners who are involved in AAI at the professional level. Taylor is based in Atlanta, GA, where she lives with her husband and 11 dogs.



Jackie Vasquez-

Theodorakis is a native of Tucson, Arizona, and earned a bachelor's degree in Special Education from Arizona State University and a master's degree in Educational Leadership from Missouri Western University. At Arizona State Jackie was a NCAA National Champion and All-American student-

athlete. In 2010 Jackie became a registered Pet Partners handler with her three-legged toy poodle Reba and joined Mo-Kan Pet Partners. After moving back to Tucson in 2011, Jackie helped form and lead Pet Partners of Southern Arizona. Jackie now has three Pet Partners registered therapy dogs: Reba; Tova (a flat coated retriever); and Walter (a three-legged Maltipoo).

Jackie was previously the Director of Southern Arizona at Gabriel's Angels, an Arizona non-profit whose mission is to inspire confidence, compassion and best behaviors in at-risk children through pet therapy. Jackie was responsible for the day-to-day leadership operations in Southern Arizona including volunteer management, recruitment, fundraising, working with advisory boards, event management, public speaking, media relations, marketing and social media.

Jackie says, "I'm thrilled to be joining the talented staff at Pet Partners. I'm excited to work under the leadership of Annie Peters and I look forward to making an impact in communities all around the country." When asked by her husband why she wanted to work for Pet Partners she used a baseball analogy, saying, "I feel like I've been called up to play for the New York Yankees."

Jackie will focus on Field Relations for the western U.S. and Canada. In addition to her field relations responsibilities, Jackie will have a special focus on issues of branding and identity for groups. Jackie lives in Tucson with her husband Tom, their daughter Olivia, and their three dogs. In her spare time, she enjoys running marathons and working out.

 Pet Partners
**WORLD'S
 LARGEST
 PET WALK**

Humans and pets from around the world participate in our Inaugural World's Largest Pet Walk

World's Largest Pet Walk: By the Numbers

511 walkers who took our official pledge to participate on www.petpartners.org

47 states where we know participants joined in (Come on Delaware, Wyoming, and South Dakota! We need you in 2019)

419 Official shirts purchased to commemorate our inaugural event

01 steers who pledged to walk (Thanks Walter from New Hampshire!)

06 Longest distance pledged in miles (You go Bela in Texas!)



On September 29, thousands of feet, paws, and hooves all around the world took part in the first World's Largest Pet Walk, presented by Pet Partners. The walk was held as an extension of our popular Walk With Me™ program and to promote the health benefits of being active with our pets. Walkers were encouraged to grab their leashes and lace up their walking shoes to participate wherever and however was right for them.

What fun it was to see such creative ways of participating in the World's Largest Pet Walk! Some of our Community Partner groups hosted local events with registered Pet Partners therapy animal teams leading the way. Some of our supportive corporate partners including Elanco and Mars Petcare hosted workplace events, inviting employees to walk with Pet Partners teams, or their own pets. We also enjoyed seeing handlers conduct walks at schools and senior care communities, and even team up with other non-profits such as their local YMCA, humane organizations, or Walk With a Doc to host pet-friendly walks. We even had people walking in Finland and Romania!

Many folks took an informal approach and simply walked along their favorite sidewalks or hiked their favorite trails with their pets, inviting family, friends, and neighbors to join in. We loved seeing the wonderful selfies and group photos that were posted to our social media channels. Check out #worldslargestpetwalk on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to see for yourself!

Be sure to mark your calendars for next year!
 Our 2nd Annual World's Largest Pet Walk will take place on **Saturday, September 28, 2019.**





ADVOCATE

The Year in Advocacy

One year after launching our advocacy program, Pet Partners is seeing real impact from our work. In 2018, our 5,706 advocates took 14,247 advocacy actions, emailing and tweeting Congress in support of the Pet and Women Safety Act and the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers Act.

In Michigan and New York, we successfully strengthened therapy animal laws. A Michigan law would have allowed anyone to become a certified therapy animal handler with almost no

training, until a Pet Partners advocate intervened and prevented this provision from becoming law. In New York, Pet Partners was invited to join the governor's Therapy Dog Working Group to advise on setting standards and training requirements for therapy dogs.

After years of failing to pass, the Pet and Women Safety Act (PAWS Act) is close to becoming law in the final weeks of the year. Thanks in part to the efforts of Pet Partners advocates, the Senate incorporated the PAWS

Act into the Farm Bill, and the House and Senate are negotiating a final version of the Farm Bill with the PAWS Act in it. We were honored to join a coalition of pet industry organizations including Nestle Purina PetCare, Bayer Corporation, Human Animal Bond Research Institute, Urban Resource Institute, and Noah's Animal House in contributing our grassroots expertise to advancing the PAWS Act.

We hosted and participated in several advocacy events in 2018, including Pet Night on

Capitol Hill and Therapy Dogs on Capitol Hill. Our advocates have also benefitted from three advocacy webinars featuring experts and even a Member of Congress.

Looking ahead to 2019, Pet Partners plans to build on the success of our advocacy program by increasing the number of states we're working in and looking for new opportunities to protect and expand access to the human-animal bond.

A Life of Service and Giving to Others



Ingrid Sunzenauer was a federal employee for 32 years. Over the course of her career working for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), she recognized she had chosen a field of service to others. An entomologist through education and training, Ingrid was a senior adviser focusing on the interface of risk management and ecological risk assessment, the goal of which is to evaluate the harmful effects of pesticides on ecological resources.

Although Ingrid is now retired, her service to people continues, not only through her many volunteer roles but by including selected non-profits in her estate plan. She has thoughtfully named Pet Partners to receive a bequest upon her passing. Through this action, she has become part of the Pet Partners Caring Community, a growing number of individuals who have notified Pet Partners that they will continue to touch the lives of others through a legacy gift.

Helping veterans, people with Alzheimer's and dementia, and seniors are areas of special interest for Ingrid. She recognizes that Pet Partners teams make impactful visits to these people, and through her future bequest plans to continue to support those in need, thus leaving a legacy of helping others. Ingrid made the decision to support Pet Partners by including the organization through a bequest in her will.

Ingrid was also impressed by therapy animal visits that were made to her good friend who was hospitalized. She recognized that this friend appreciated and benefitted from these visits, and that struck a chord with Ingrid.

Pet Partners is appreciative of generous people like Ingrid, who take necessary steps to include our organization in their estate plans. It is through the generosity of individuals that Pet Partners continues to grow and touch people with three million therapy animal visits annually. Consider joining the Caring Community with Ingrid by naming Pet Partners as a beneficiary of your estate plan.

Pet Partners

Tax ID# 91-1158281

Address: 345 118th Avenue SE, Suite 200
Bellevue, WA 98005-3587

For more information,
contact Mary Bohmke,
maryb@petpartners.org, or 425-679-5502.

Letters to the Editor

Q

I recently saw some news about a study showing therapy dogs could transfer “superbugs” like MRSA during visits. Is this something to be concerned about?

Infection control is always a concern when therapy animals are making visits, particularly for clients who might be immunocompromised. This risk is why Pet Partners has standards for pet grooming, hand hygiene, and other infection control measures that our registered teams are required to follow.

As reported by media, study results indicated that “superbugs” could be transferred on the coats of therapy dogs. This is an important distinction; the dogs were not infected with the germs, but instead had the germs transferred onto their coats when they were petted by people who already had the germs on their hands. The germs were then transferred to the next people to pet the dogs. The study results also showed that thorough hand hygiene both *before and after* petting the dogs, such as washing hands or use of hand sanitizer, reduced the risk of transferring germs.

Dr. Scott Weese, member of the Pet Partners Human-Animal Bond Advisory Board and veterinary advisor to the Therapy Animal Program, wrote about these media reports in the blog **Worms and Germs**, and had a couple of important takeaways, quoted below:

Pet therapy programs have clear benefits, but they’re not zero risk (like most things in life). The cost-benefit needs to be considered in each case, but there are some basic precautions we can use to minimize the “cost” (risk) component. [...]

*Ultimately, it doesn’t matter if the dog is an MRSA carrier or if the person is an MRSA carrier, as long as basic hygiene practices are used. Most importantly, if the person washes their hands or uses a hand sanitizer **before and after** animal contact, the risk of transmission in both directions can be minimized.*

To read Dr. Weese’s entire post on the topic, visit the blog at wormsandgermsblog.com

Pet Partners strives to make every therapy animal visit as safe as possible. We have multiple procedures and policy requirements designed to support this goal and reduce the possibility of infection during visits.

- Grooming requirements that specify bathing prior to visits, along with special attention to feet, nails/hooves, noses, eyes and ears.
- Requirements that clients wash their hands both before and after touching therapy animals, or use hand sanitizer if hand-washing isn’t possible—this is why Pet Partners handlers carry hand sanitizer while visiting.
- Use of barriers when appropriate during visits such as if pets will be on a client’s bed or lap.
- Use of equipment and accessories that can be easily cleaned or laundered, as well as items without sharp parts or edges that could scratch or cut clients.
- Health requirements for therapy animals that confirm they are up to date on vaccinations and free of parasites, and a prohibition on raw meat diets.



Pet Partners also provides handlers with high-quality education on infection control. All handlers receive instruction about our infection control requirements as part of our Handler Course, which is mandatory for all prospective handlers and encouraged as a refresher for current and renewing handlers. In addition, we are proud to have the *only* coursework on infection prevention and control for therapy animals that is endorsed by the Society of Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA).

We feel so strongly about the importance of this information that current Pet Partners handlers have access to both the Handler Course and the Infection Prevention and Control course online at no cost. We encourage all currently registered Pet Partners handlers to take advantage of these resources. Current handlers can take the online courses by visiting the Training Center (through the Volunteer Center) on the Pet Partners website.

The Infection Prevention and Control coursework is also available to the public for a modest cost, and we encourage anyone working in a setting with therapy animals to consider taking this valuable course. Visit petpartners.org/learn/online-education/ for more information.

As with many things in life, therapy animal visits do present some risk. But they also offer great benefits. Pet Partners feels very strongly that the benefits of animal-assisted interventions are so valuable that we must do what we can to reduce the risks, and continue safely bringing the power of the human-animal bond to everyone who can benefit.

Do you have a question on a topic that would be of interest to a broad audience? Send it for consideration to editor@petpartners.org. If you need an immediate response, please contact Pet Partners at petpartners.org/about-us/contact-us/



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**2019 Pet Partners Conference:
Partnering with a Purpose**

Our 2019 conference will be held in San Antonio, Texas, September 20-21. We're hard at work planning engaging and informative sessions, recruiting the top leaders and speakers in AAI, and making opportunities for in-person connections. More information will be available in the first part of 2019. Make sure you're signed up for email updates to get all the details! Go to petpartners.org and the Connect With Us section.