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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 20, 2023

Pet Partners Announces its 2023 Pet of the Year Winner: Rye Guy **—Minnesota Australian Shepherd takes top prize, raising funds for animal-assisted therapy—**

(Bellevue, WA, March 20, 2023) – After six weeks of fundraising, Rye Guy from Rochester, MN, has earned the title of 2023 Pet Partners Pet of the Year! Rye, with support from his human teammate Lindsey Wallace, raised more than \$14,000 for Pet Partners, the nation’s leading organization registering therapy animals for animal-assisted interventions.

Rye, an Australian shepherd, is one of 88 pets who participated in the competition. Pets and their human teammates from all over the world competed for the Pet of the Year title by raising vital funds to support Pet Partners’ Therapy Animal Program, which brings unconditional love, happiness, and healing to millions of seniors, patients, veterans, children, and others in need around the world. Rye is part of a registered Pet Partners team with his human teammate Lindsey, who is a Pet Partners handler and team evaluator. Lindsey also volunteers as a Pet Partners animal-assisted crisis response team with another of her pups.

Rye takes the title after surpassing nearly 90 other candidates from 32 states and three countries. Doc Snuggles from Carmel, IN and Mika the Chow Pei from New York, NY secured second and third place in the competition, raising nearly \$16,000 combined. Rye Guy and his fundraising team garnered donations by holding a raffle, having a Pawcasso painting event, selling stickers and pins, collecting donations from friends, family, and co-workers plus a corporate matching gift, along with reaching out to local businesses including Penz Automotive Group, Wellness Pet Food, The Tap House West End, and Blue-9 Pet Products.

“We are sincerely grateful to all of our supporters who helped Rye become the 2023 Pet Partners Pet of the Year. It feels incredible to be a part of such a strong community. We are truly honored to receive all this love and represent Pet Partners in this way,” says Lindsey. “It is clear that therapy animals have a gift that touches the lives of so many people to make the world a better place. Rye is just one example of a pet with that gift.”

The competition, which kicked off on February 1 and ran through March 15, raised a total of nearly \$60,000 to support Pet Partners. It was open to all pets, not just therapy animals. Many people who entered their pets wanted to share their personal stories about the benefits of the human-animal bond while fundraising for a mission they believe in.

As the winner, Rye not only takes home the national title, but also thousands of dollars’ worth of prizes for his exceptional fundraising skills. Rye will also have a professional photoshoot, take part in national media interviews, and receive a variety of pet-focused treats and prizes.

“This competition continues to showcase the role pets play in our lives and the bond we share with them. I am so grateful to all our candidates for helping us spread the word about the importance of animal-assisted therapy,”

said C. Annie Peters, President & CEO of Pet Partners. “The stories were amazing. I want to personally thank Rye and his human Lindsey as well as all the other candidates and fundraising teams that made Pet of the Year a success.”

For more details or to request interviews with the national winner, please contact Pet Partners at press@petpartners.org.

About Pet Partners

Pet Partners is the leader in the therapy animal field for registering volunteer teams. Since 1977, we have supported thousands of teams in making millions of safe, effective visits across the country and around the world. Through the human-animal bond, we can improve the physical, social, and emotional lives of both the people and animals involved. Pet Partners supports volunteer teams by offering the highest quality preparation, an unmatched approach to evaluation and registration—for nine different types of animals, and a focus on connections. We elevate the importance of therapy animal visits, and our teams help build a healthier and happier world for us all. Whether or not you have a pet, learn more about sharing the human-animal bond by visiting petpartners.org.

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