



CONTACT:

Mary Tan

Whisker Media Pet Strategic Communications

612-209-3303 | mary@whiskermedia.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pet Partners Announces 2024 Pet of the Year: Darby the Miniature Horse

Hawaiian Horse raises close to \$17,000 for therapy animal visits

(Bellevue, Wash. - March 21, 2024) – After six weeks of an exciting fundraising competition, Darby, a miniature horse who lives in Kamuela, Hawaii, earned the title of 2024 Pet Partners Pet of the Year with help from his human Lynn Scully. Darby has not only captured hearts nationwide but also raised \$16,692 for Pet Partners, the leading organization registering therapy animals to support people and communities in need around the world with meaningful visits.

Darby, a registered Pet Partners therapy horse, is one of 118 pets that participated in the competition. Pets from 32 states and Canada competed with the help of over 160 loving humans for the Pet of the Year title. While 87 of the competitors were dogs, there were also 23 cats, three equines, three rabbits, one miniature donkey, and one domestic rat vying for the top honor. Their efforts raised 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 around the world.

Darby and their fundraising team garnered donations by soliciting support from friends and family, meeting with local paddling teams and the local pageant queen, and hosting events in local pubs. Darby even joined a local Irish dance group on Saint Patrick's Day.

Tara Waggybottom, a dog from Redmond, Wash., claimed second place. Hooey the Hoosier Doodle, a dog from Cumberland, Ind., came in third place with Cheeto Bandito, a dog from Austin, Tex., following closely in fourth place, with only a \$31 difference in their fundraising totals. Tara and Cheeto are also registered therapy dogs and Animal-Assisted Crisis Response Teams with Pet Partners. The top winners together achieved an impressive fundraising amount of \$21,579.

"We are deeply honored and grateful to be named the 2024 Pet Partners Pet of the Year," said Lynn Scully. "This is a great opportunity for Darby in his role as a Pet Partners registered therapy horse to raise awareness that there are eight other species besides dogs that can serve as therapy animals, and he will take that job very seriously. We aim to recruit more teams to provide the comfort that only furry friends can offer."

The competition kicked off on February 5 and ran through March 18, and raised a total of over \$73,000 to support Pet Partners. It was open to all pets, not just therapy animals, including those that have crossed the Rainbow Bridge. 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.

“We are continually amazed by and grateful for the dedication shown by our Pet Partners Pet of the Year participants,” said Pet Partners President and CEO C. Annie Peters. “Their commitment to supporting all our wonderful therapy animal teams embodies the spirit of our organization. Congratulations to Darby the miniature horse and his human Lynn Scully and thank you to everyone who helped make Pet of the Year 2024 a success.”

As the winner, Darby not only claims the national title, but also thousands of dollars’ worth of prizes for his exceptional fundraising skills. Darby will participate in a professional photoshoot, be interviewed on the national *Oh Behave!* podcast on Pet Life Radio, as well as the *Four Legged Life* nationally syndicated radio show. He will receive a wide variety of pet-focused treats, services, accessories, and other prizes.

For more details or to request interviews with the national winner, please contact Mary Tan at the above information.

###

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 meaningful 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.