

Therapy dog is a welcome visitor for area nursing home residents

By APRIL FEAGLEY
Daily News Staff Writer

Kayla, a volunteer at Woodland Retirement Community, Orbisonia, causes a stir as she makes her rounds, even though she doesn't say a single word. The 9-year-old golden retriever, a certified therapy dog, and her owner, Bobbi Garber of Blairs Mills, visit the residents every Wednesday morning,

"When I put on her yellow bandana, she knows where we are going," said Garber. "She loves coming here."

The yellow bandana identifies Kayla as being certified through Keystone Pet Enhanced Therapy Services (KPETS), Lancaster, an organization Garber has been affiliated with since 2007.

"I remember reading an article about the lady who started KPETS when we lived in Lancaster," she said. "I had actually just retired and wanted to find something to do that I could give back a little. When I read the article, I knew it was a perfect fit for me and Kayla."

KPETS was founded by Karen Gerth of Lancaster in 2003 as a nonprofit organization to promote animal-assisted therapy.

"We have over 300 registered volunteer teams — each one a person and their dog," said Gerth. "There are a lot of Labrador

and golden retrievers, just because those breeds are so popular, and we have little ones as small as Chihuahuas. Being certified (as a therapy dog) all depends on the dog's temperament."

KPETS screens therapy dog candidates prior to certification to ensure temperament, behavior and socialization are suited for various applications.

"We take our pets and visit hospices, hospitals, retirement communities and schools. We also take pets to court to help kids who have to testify," Gerth said. "The dogs can be used in occupational, speech and cognitive therapy, too."

Garber said Kayla was particularly well-suited to therapy work due to her outgoing personality.

"She craves attention and loves people. I just knew she would be good at it," she said. "If we have a party, she's the official

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Photo by APRIL FEAGLEY

Bobbi Garber, left, and her certified therapy dog, Kayla, visit with Charlie Morningstar, a resident at Woodland Retirement Community, Orbisonia.



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greeter. She's not overbearing about it, but she brings a toy to anyone who comes to our house."

During the KPETS screening process, Kayla was tested

on her friendliness with other dogs, obedience skills and distractibility.

"They have to be able to deal with wheelchairs, walkers and loud noises. We want them to respond to loud noises like alarms, but not go nuts," said Garber.

Upon moving to the southern

Huntingdon County area, the pair soon found a warm welcome at Woodland Retirement Community and began their regular visits.

"(Kayla) is usually dragging me on to the next person," said Garber.

The canine companion stops often as she walks down the hallways, taking the time to lean gently against the residents as they enjoy scratching her ears or petting her silky coat.

"I just love her," said Woodland Retirement Community resident Sharon Harbst. "She is a really sweet dog."

Enthusiastic greetings came from the rooms of Charlie and Ernie Morningstar as soon as they saw Kayla pad toward them on a recent Wednesday morning. The brothers took turns visiting with their guest who soaked in the lavish attention.

"I just see (the residents') whole faces light up. It makes my heart feel good," said Garber. "It brings a bit of light into their day."

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02-06-13-27-30

BIG FOUR

9-3-8-8

QUINTO

9-4-4-0-4

CASH 5

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MEGA MILLIONS

06-16-45-54-60

MEGABALL

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