

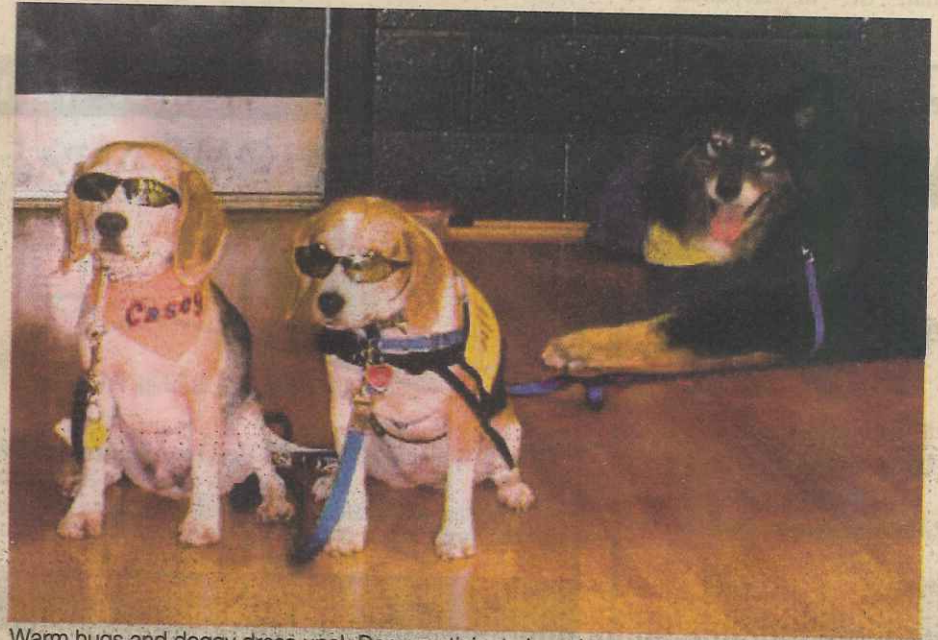
# Pets Visit Touch Our Lives and Warm Our Hearts

by CAROLYN ARTZ

Many heartwarming photographs exhibit Fido and Kitty in the loving arms of an elderly resident or hospital patient. Most of us, however, are aware you can't just take a pet into a hospital or other facility. There are health and liability issues. It would not be in the best interest of either all the patients or the pet. However, studies have shown that the human and animal relationship has its benefits. Patients allowed to see or touch animals often have less anxiety, lower blood pressure, increased morale, and overall better health. Therapeutic animal services are being used more and more.

There are two distinct type services. Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) is conducted by a handler and his animal under professional guidance to achieve specific physical, social, emotional or cognitive improvement for the patient. The animal is an integral part of the treatment plan and progress is strictly documented. Animal Assisted Activities (AAA) are more casual, but can be just as beneficial.

In Central Pennsylvania K-Pets (Keystone Pet Enhanced Therapeutic Services) promotes the healing and rehabilitating benefits of the human/animal bond. They train volunteers and their pets (usually dogs) and match them to people with a need. The demand for visits always exceeds what is available - volunteers are needed. Services benefit seniors in long term care facilities, hospital patients, children in reading programs at schools and libraries, at-risk teens at detention centers, autistic children,



Warm hugs and doggy dress ups! Dogs participate in variety of events from Halloween, summer reading programs, to just one-on-one visits. The beagles belong to Laura Whitman in Palmyra. Gini Swartzel has two chows, Gizmo and Tessa, who have a wardrobe to dress up for special occasions!

people with Alzheimer's disease and others. Recently York and Elizabethtown Colleges both scheduled sessions for students to de-stress during final exam time!

Laura Whitman and Gini Swartzel of Palmyra are volunteers for K-Pets, and offer assistance to anyone interested in the program. Laura explained the training procedures:

- An orientation for the pet handler where goals and procedures are discussed. The orientation class is held monthly at various posted locations.

- A dog test workshop where the pet is evaluated. General obedience and commands are tested, and the pet's behavior noted. If the dog does not pass, recommendations are made and he may repeat the class until he is ready.

- Two on-site supervised visits usually to nursing homes or the type location which will be used. Two different evaluators are used to observe and make suggestions.

- The handler completes paperwork, receives K-Pets name tag, registration for his pet, and liability protection insurance through K-Pets. K-Pets matches the handler with clients, however, the handler is also free to set his own visitation schedule or program.

Animal Assisted Activities are customized to the client. Laura explained hospitals and larger facilities have protocols, whereas many nursing homes are less restrictive and welcome both individual and group visits. Some clients just enjoy seeing

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