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## Program Turns 5 (or is that 35?)

It is still hard for me to believe that casual inquiries with Volunteer Services about starting a program early in 2004 would result in a program that is up to 24 dogs, has brochures, business cards, and a scholarship program funded by incredible donations from the community. When Erik and I first started visiting in September 2004, I had very modest goals, both for the program and for him (due to his newest cancer diagnosis). Both were greatly exceeded. The only way we could have grown this program is by the effort put in by all the teams, current and now gone.

Here's to another 5!

NOVEMBER  
2009



Dear Friends and Furry Friends,

This is a special time to be thankful for all you do and to recognize each of you for your extraordinary dedication and compassion you bring to St. Mary's patients, visitors and staff. As the program marks its 5 year anniversary, there is so much to celebrate! The program has grown to 24 teams! As recipient of the 2006 WAVE Award (Wisconsin Award for Volunteer Excellence) thru the Wisconsin Hospital Association, you have inspired other hospitals to establish Pet Therapy Programs in their hospitals. Congratulations!

You are a blessing to St. Mary's each time you walk through our doors - for which we are thankful. Your loyalty and friendship mean so much.

Heartfelt thanks to each of you for enhancing the exceptional care our patients receive. Your kindness brings a "home-like" experience to our patients and families. The unique service you provide creates positive memories and happy moments - at a time when some patients may not have much to be happy about. You generate and share lasting heart warming stories.

Special thanks to Mary Seim and Dan Darmstadter for their leadership with the program. Dan, thank you for establishing the program and the extra hours you work each week to assure the success of the program. Mary, thanks for agreeing to be the Mentor for new Pet Therapy volunteers. The mentor program has existed for other volunteers (periodic follow-ups during their first year) and we are now extending it to Pet Therapy.

Happy Thanksgiving to you and your family.

Joanne

The following quote is from a sympathy card (and photo) I received after Erik's death. I share this because it is an important reminder that we often do not realize how we may have touched the lives of a patient or family member with whom we shared our dog. This time it happened to be Erik; the next time it could be you.

*"My 95 year old mother passed away on March 3, 2009, 2 days after having surgery for a fractured hip. This picture was taken right before she went to surgery....My mom loved animals, but especially Golden Retrievers, as that was the last dog she owned. What joy you brought her just two days before her departure from this earth.....this is the last photo we have of our wonderful mom."*

## Recent Donations

### Shorewood Hills Elementary

In the last newsletter, I let you know that Shorewood Elementary School adopted our program for their spring fundraising drive. The ended up raising close to \$500 by just collecting loose change. Incredible.

### Kelliher Family

We have received many generous donations over the past few years, but a few months ago, a patient passed away that had several pet therapy visits while he was hospitalized. His family valued the program so much that they asked for donations to the program in lieu of flowers. We were stunned to learn a few weeks later that \$1700 was donated in his honor.

## New Teams

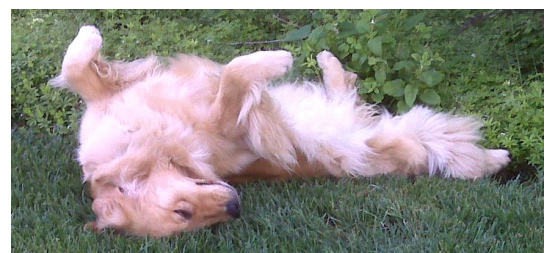
We've seen incredible growth in the last 6 months, in large part to an informal partnership we've formed with the Badger Kennel Club. I have spoken to their Pet Therapy classes and this Fall, class participants will be shadowing some of our teams to see pet therapy in action. Several of the new teams listed below are active members in BKC and teach classes and/or represent their dog's breed.

Steve Heimerl and his Sheltie Austin  
Dave McGuire and his Doberman Blackjack  
Carol Mahlik and her Golden Retrievers Montana and Shiloh  
Mark and Tonya Scribner and Harry (Weinaraner), Ranger and Lucky (Dalmatians)  
John Albright and his German Shepherd Rudy  
Mary Corbett and her Australian Shepherd Chewy  
Cate Manowske and her Lab Mix Annie  
Karen Peckham (existing handler) and her other Golden, Raider

## THANKS.....And I'm Almost Back in the Game

I'm never going to tire of thanking everyone for all you did to support me through Erik's passing. It meant so much. But almost as important was all you did to keep the program moving forward while my involvement was reduced, including the willingness to be shadowed by prospects. This is best way I know to get people excited about joining our program.

So, while I thank you, I want to introduce Hannah, my new dog, to those that haven't met her. I hope to have her certified before the end of the year. She is a 2-year old retired show dog, and is well, a bit quirky in a very lovable way!



## The New Sun Prairie ER Center Is Opening Its Doors To Pet Therapy



The Sun Prairie Emergency Center opened over the summer and (as a Sun Prairie resident) I always hoped that we would be able to bring Pet Therapy out to the Center. The characteristics of an ER Center mean that it is not a candidate for a lot of regularly scheduled visits, but I had a meeting with the Manager of the Center earlier in November and she is excited to bring us on board in the following two ways.

**Drop ins:** The Center is always open and we have been invited to drop in at any time to see if anyone (staff included!) would like a visit. They are busiest on the weekends, especially Sundays, so that may make the most sense if you are planning a special trip over. However, feel free to stop in if you happen to be driving by with your dog in the car.

**On-Call:** This was my original vision for the Center. We have 3-4 teams in the Sun Prairie area that could be called on to come in to lend support to family or patients. My thought was that, for instance, it might be a neat thing for a scared child to get a dog by their side in certain situations. This would be completely on an “as available” basis.

We are still working through the processes and details for this arrangement, but please let me know if you would like to participate in either of these ways. I will follow up with interested teams to explain more of the details.

## Waterless Cleaning Cloths Will Be Provided to Teams

In part because of possible on-call visits to the ER Center, we have decided to use program funds to buy a supply of waterless cleaning cloths for all teams. While bathing before visits is still the policy, these cloths can be used if you make an unplanned, last minute visit or if your dog just needs some touching up between the bath and the visit (e.g., those darn muddy, rainy days). If you have suggestions on a brand, please let me know by December 1. I hope to have them available for teams to pick up in Volunteer Services by mid-December.

## 2009 News Stories

There were multiple news stories done on the program this year. If you did not see them, here are some links:

A Channel 3 story on Jim and Mitsy Sue can be seen at <http://www.channel3000.com/health/18692278/detail.html>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9ryTJaYvgo>: Fox47's coverage of Erik's memorial service/celebration – featured Tonka doing visits.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sL2Tdr11kmo>: NBC 15's coverage of Erik's memorial service/program celebration.

## Something to Think About

*Do you have enough business cards? Have you been giving them out like candy? I hope you have, because we can always print out more.*

## Google Groups Invite will be Sent to Your Email By November 27

I have set up a Google Groups site to allow us to more easily share information (e.g., unit contact numbers/unit assignments) and also, more importantly, to keep email addresses up to date/allow for use of a group distribution list.

The home page will be: <http://groups.google.com/group/smh-pettherapy>

The group distro list will be: [smh-pettherapy@googlegroups.com](mailto:smh-pettherapy@googlegroups.com)

I consider myself technically savvy, but the process to get set up with Google Groups is a bit cumbersome. I will be sending a separate email with a document that steps you through the process.

Please realize that Volunteer Services will be using the group distro list to send out Pet Therapy program specific mails (such as visit requests). **However, if you change your email address, you will still need to let Volunteer Services know, as they use a different program to send out communications to the entire hospital volunteer community.**

I'm still trying to figure out how to best utilize/manage the site, so any and all suggestions are welcome.

## March Speaking Opportunity in Stoughton

The hospital's Speaker's Bureau has been contacted by a local organization (the New Century Club) in Stoughton who would like to have someone speak about the Pet Therapy program at their meeting on March 8. This is a low-key event in the home of Club member, Sharon Mason-Boersma, Approximately 20 members are interested in learning about Pet Therapy and our program. If you would be interested in being the speaker (especially if you live out that way), please let me know.

## Interested in Attending An Auxiliary Board Meeting?

Pet Therapy is now part of the Auxiliary Board. If you are interested in representing the program at one of the board meetings, please let me know. The Board meets on Monday between 9-11, eight times a year.

## Holiday Visit Schedule

Please let me know if you plan on making visits over the Thanksgiving and Christmas/New Year holidays. There is no requirements here; I just like to coordinate this a bit, so if someone is kind enough to come in on a holiday they are not going at the same time as 5 other teams. Please let me know as soon as possible if you will be coming on Thanksgiving. Please let me know by December 15th if you will be coming over the end of year holidays.

I will send out mails with people's plans for each holiday period, once I hear back from all of you.

## Flu Vaccinations

Employee Health still has doses of both the seasonal and H1N1 vaccines for all interested staff and volunteers. You can contact Employee Health at 258-6778 by December 1 to schedule an appointment. You may also drop in during regular business hours, but you may have to wait for scheduled appointments to complete.

## A Few Tips for the Road

This section will include periodic reminders of best practices. Feel free to pass on ideas for future issues:

**Paws Up:** It is perfectly acceptable per the three Pet Therapy organizations (and program policy) to have your dog place it's paws on a bed/chair/sofa (or even get onto them) with the patient's and staff's permission. However, please make sure that you do the placing; never have them jump up on their own. Even if it appears perfectly safe, it is best for them to learn they never go up on their own.

Always make sure you know if the person's side closest to you is okay, so you can help evaluate risk. This is especially true with bigger animals, but we should do this for all dogs.

Please confirm with staff that it is okay to have the dog up in the bed with the patient. The patient may not see the risk, but the staff is in a better position to decide. If staff is not in the room, use the call light.

Be careful using your command for jumping up in normal conversation. Early on in my career with Erik, I used the word "Up" forcefully in a conversation and he thought I wanted him to jump up. I had him on a short leash so there was no harm, but that was an important lesson.

**Leave It:** Not what you're think....I'm not talking about leaving food alone.....I'm actually talking to you, the handler. The context here is to remind you to always leave the room when a staff member comes in to administer any treatment to the patient. If they are just checking vital signs it is okay to stay, but we don't want to run the risk of ever distracting them when they are doing anything more involved such as administering medications.

**There's No Cutting Corners to be Successful in Pet Therapy:** Be extra careful when going around a corner, especially when turning in the direction of the side that your dog is on. You never know whether someone will be on the other side of the corner and the tendency can be to cut the corner, especially if your dog is leading the way. Make it a conscious thought to always bring your dog in close to your side and make a nice wide turn. Also, be aware of the mirrors the hospital has placed at higher traffic corners to see what is on the other side.

## And Lastly.....A New Volunteer....A Few Years Out

Congratulations to Elyse Smithback and her husband Eric on the recent birth of their daughter Eden. I look forward to orienting Eden into the program when she reaches her 16th birthday in the fall of 2025!!!