

# Pet Partners

INTERACTIONS MAGAZINE

STORIES OF LIVES IMPROVED BY POSITIVE HUMAN-ANIMAL INTERACTIONS.



## Pet Partners

*Touching Lives, Improving Health*

- *More Than Dogs.....pg. 4*
- *Research Focus.....pg. 9*
- *Field Relations.....pg. 10*
- *Conference.....pg. 13*
- *Events.....pg. 14*







Pet Partners is required to file financial information with several states. Ten of those states will provide copies to their residents upon request:

**California:** Pet Partners is registered as 'Pet Partners Therapy Animals' in the state of California.

**Florida:** A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE, WITHIN THE STATE, 1-800-HELP-FLA. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE. CH3226.

**Maryland:** For the cost of copies and postage, Office of the Secretary of State, State House, Annapolis, MD 21401.

**Mississippi:** The official registration and financial information of Pet Partners may be obtained from the Mississippi Secretary of State's office by calling 1-888-236-6167. Registration by the Secretary of State does not imply endorsement.

**Missouri:** Pet Partners is registered as 'Pet Partners Nonprofit Corporation' in the state of Missouri.

**New Jersey:** INFORMATION FILED WITH THE ATTORNEY GENERAL CONCERNING THIS CHARITABLE SOLICITATION and the percentage of contributions received by the charity during the last reporting period that were dedicated to the charitable purpose MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY BY CALLING 973-504-6215 and is available on the internet at [www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/ocp.htm#charity](http://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/ocp.htm#charity). REGISTRATION WITH THE ATTORNEY GENERAL DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT.

**New York:** Office of the Attorney General, Department of Law, Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.

**North Carolina:** Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Licensing Branch at 1-888-830-4989. The license is not an endorsement by the state. Pet Partners is registered as 'Pet Partners Nonprofit Corporation' in North Carolina.

**North Dakota:** Pet Partners is registered as 'Pet Partners Therapy Animals' in North Dakota.

**Pennsylvania:** The official registration and financial information of Pet Partners may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

**Virginia:** State Division of Consumer Affairs, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, PO Box 1163, Richmond, VA 23218.

**Washington:** Charities Division, Office of the Secretary of State, State of Washington, Olympia, WA 98504-0422, 1-800-332-4483.

**West Virginia:** Residents may obtain a summary of the registration and financial documents from the Secretary of State, State Capitol, Charleston, WV 25305.

REGISTRATION WITH A STATE AGENCY DOES NOT CONSTITUTE OR IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THAT STATE.

**In 2019, about 3 million visits will be made across all 50 states.**

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

*Board Chair*

**Michael Sapp**  
PetSmart

*Board Vice-Chair*

**Julie Lawless**  
Elanco Animal Health

*Treasurer*

**Dana Brooks**  
Pet Food Institute

*Secretary*

**Marcie Whichard**

*Immediate Past Board Chair (Ex-Officio)*

**Diana Kiriakides**

### BOARD MEMBERS

**Erik Arnold**  
Microsoft Philanthropies

**Chad Biagini**  
Nolan Partners

**Reshma Bishnoi**

**Alicen Blair**  
Boydin Global Executive Search

**Michael Castagna, PharmD**  
MannKind Corporation

**Doris Daif**  
Nike

**Wilson P. Garone**  
Microsoft Corporation

**Julia Geffner**  
Best Friends Pet Hotel

**Jim Hedington**  
Starbucks Coffee Company

**Janice Kapner**  
T-Mobile US, Inc.

**Jeff Keune**  
Yesway

**Brett Lauter**  
Morris 4x4

**Angel May**  
Mars Petcare US

**Kay D. Mooney**  
CVS Health

**Mike Mossholder**  
Vision Venture Partners

**Jon Persch**  
Tribeca Enterprises

**Michael Price**  
Price Management

**Marc Scarduffa**  
Pfizer, Inc.

**Brian Schwartz**  
Extol Capital

**Lori Ware**  
San Manuel Band of Mission Indians

### HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND ADVISORY BOARD

*HABAB Chair*

**Aubrey Fine, EdD**  
Cal State Polytechnic

**Sandra Barker, PhD**  
Virginia Commonwealth University

**Peter C. Canning, PhD**

**Mary Craig, DVM**  
Gentle Goodbye Veterinary Hospice

**Steve Dale, CABC**  
Steve Dale Pet World LLC

**Steven L. Feldman**  
HABRI Foundation

**Lisa Freeman, DVM, PhD, DACVN**  
Tufts University

**Nancy R. Gee, PhD**  
State University of New York, Fredonia

**Maggie O'Haire, PhD**  
Purdue University

**Peter Rabinowitz, MD, MPH**  
University of Washington

**Leslie Stewart, PhD, LPC**  
Idaho State University

**J. Scott Weese, DVM, DVSc, DACVIM**  
Ontario Veterinary College

**Melissa Winkle, OTR/L**  
Animal Assisted Intervention International

### PUBLICATION CREDITS:

**Editor:** Elisabeth Van Every

**Contributors:** Mary Bohmke, Abby Chesnut, Linda Dicus, Sherry Eddy, Brandon Fuller, Taylor Johnson, PhD, Niki Kuklenski, C. Annie Peters, Traci Pryor, Krista Renta, Moira Smith, Elisabeth Van Every, Jackie Vasquez Theodorakis, Linda Woods

**Graphic Design:** Laxman2creative

**Cover Image:** Photo credits: Patti Anderson, Abby Chesnut, Sherry Eddy, Niki Kuklenski, Cecily Lane, Krista Renta, Moira Smith, Linda Woods. Collage by Laxman2creative

**Pet Partners**  
425.679.5500  
[www.petpartners.org](http://www.petpartners.org)



# A Letter from the President & CEO Annie Peters

to interact more with the people around them.

## We want to know you better!

Regardless of what species in your household dons a Pet Partners vest to go to work, please let us know if your therapy animal has their own social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. We want to follow you and share your great posts! Email us at [digitalmedia@petpartners.org](mailto:digitalmedia@petpartners.org) and let's hashtag our way to sharing your great stories with an even larger audience!

## And bring those trading cards!

When we see you at our conference in San Antonio on September 20-21, please bring your trading cards! Pet Partners staff are working hard to support you and your registered animals, but we don't get the honor and the opportunity nearly enough to meet you and your partners in person. So when we're together Partnering with a Purpose, please take a moment to tell us about your partner!

See you then!

**Annie**

was happening that day because the therapy dogs were coming. Never mind that they might have seen the dogs just last week; they greeted Molly and Walter (human names not important!) like rock stars or the source of all warmth and love the universe had to offer.

In light of the numbers of registered therapy dogs, it's sometimes easy to forget that not everyone is a "dog person," or to underestimate the power of a surprise visit from a llama, pig, or mini-horse, or the joy of reading to a highly engaged bird, or the tender exchange between a child and a rabbit, guinea pig, or rat. In fact, more than 60 million American households\* have one or more dogs while more than 47 million households\* would vote "cat" if they were running against each other for office. This strikes me most of all in nursing homes, where it would be incredible if more people who spent their younger days loving cats had the opportunity for a feline head rub and a soft purr.

Species diversity is just one of the many things that sets Pet Partners apart. We hope you enjoy this issue's feature article and that when you're finished reading it, you'll pass it along to someone with one of these species as a pet who might be able to meet Pet Partners' high standards and brighten someone's day, lower their blood pressure, or encourage them



## Calling all cats!

And mini horses, rabbits, guinea pigs, rats, pigs, birds, and llamas!

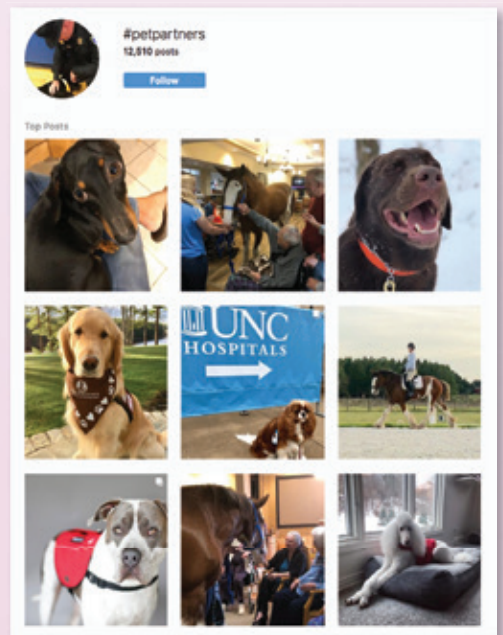
Don't get us wrong. We LOVE our therapy dogs regardless of age, size, breed, or origin. We love them so much that when I was ready to welcome another dog into my life, every time I met one of you and your dog or saw your trading cards, that was exactly the kind of dog I wanted. Those really smart Brussels griffons in Venice Beach? Yes, please! The rescued greyhound in Nashville? I ran off to web search "greyhound rescue."

\*numbers courtesy of American Pet Products Association

The standard poodle in Tucson? I'm in love with her brains and beauty.

As I've written about before, I ended up with a rescue pup who started out on the streets of Arkansas with a broken tail that I hope is the only reminder of her figuring out how to survive on her own. She may not be perfect but she's perfect for me.

The therapy dogs that comprise 94% of our team registrations are doing amazing things. I recently had the pleasure of watching youth in a club house in south Tucson show up for whatever





# More Than Dogs

## The Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program takes pride in having multiple species of therapy animals.

When someone says “therapy animal,” most people will immediately think of dogs. That’s understandable; dogs have been shaped by humans to have the ideal blend of temperament, human affiliation, and capacity for obedience to make them a perfect fit for therapy animal work, and dogs make up 94% of Pet Partners team registrations. But dogs aren’t the only species that can provide the life-changing effects that come with the human-animal bond. Pet Partners has long recognized this, and we’re proud to register nine types of animals as part of our Therapy Animal Program.

In addition to dogs, Pet Partners currently registers these animals:

- Cats
- Equines, which includes miniature horses, ponies, and donkeys
- Rabbits, guinea pigs, and domestic rats (sometimes referred to collectively as pocket pets)
- Birds (mostly in the parrot family)
- Miniature pigs
- Llamas and alpacas

All of these species have a demonstrated history of serving as therapy animals safely and without significant negative impacts to the animals’ welfare, supported by documentation and research. That’s a critical aspect of

accepting these species as therapy animals—we never want to put a client at risk from a therapy animal visit, and we always support the welfare of our registered therapy animals.

All of the species we register share certain traits: The capacity to have a meaningful bond with a handler; socialization and comfort in interacting with humans; and some degree of learning and following guidance from their handler. Beyond that, each species has unique characteristics that bring something special to animal-assisted interventions.

### Cats

There’s been a recent upswing in interest about cats as therapy animals, but they’re not new in this role—our Therapy Animal Program has had more than 1500 cats registered over the years and currently has more than 180 registered cat teams. Cats are appealing to people who might not like dogs, and their smaller size and affinity for sitting on laps and cuddling can make them a good option for quieter environments and people who have limited mobility. And there’s the impression of cats as being particular about who they interact with and how that influences the way people perceive them. “Cats have a reputation for being selectively affectionate. If a cat likes you, you’re special,” says

Moira Smith, Pet Partners staff member, team evaluator, and cat handler. All of these things make visiting with a therapy cat a special experience.



*Wayne comforting a client*

Perhaps even more than dogs, cats need to have a specific personality and temperament to be suitable as therapy animals. Cats tend to be sensitive to change and not enjoy travel, which can make it challenging to take them visiting. Getting them used to a harness and leash can be an issue if they weren’t started at a young age. Their body language can be less expressive than dogs, and their mood can change suddenly. “One thing I keep in mind is the concept of ‘kitty-minutes,’” says Smith. “They escalate to fight, flight, or freeze very quickly and do not usually recover well.” A therapy cat handler needs to

have a strong bond with their pet and understand the cat’s body language and behaviors intimately to make sure the cat is genuinely enjoying visiting.

The impact a cat can have as a therapy animal is significantly larger than the cat itself. Moira Smith and her Pet Partner cat Wayne visited with seniors at an extended care facility, people who were recovering from stroke or living with early dementia. “Sometimes it was all about Wayne and I was a bystander while they pet him and sweet-talked him; other times Wayne was happy to snuggle on their bed and be

pet for a minute or two while the client told their favorite memories and gossiped to me,” says Smith. “We were often told by the staff, ‘that’s the first time I’ve seen him/her smile, speak, engage.’ We received some very sweet notes from some patients who recovered and went home, saying Wayne was the best part of their stay and thanking us for helping them get through their rehabilitation. I have one of the notes framed in my home.”

### Equines

Equines are the second largest group of animals registered with Pet Partners, with more

than 300 equine teams as of this writing. This includes miniature horses, ponies, miniature donkeys, and a few full-sized horses. Smaller equines are a better option for the kind of AAI most Pet Partners teams do, because it's easier for them to enter facilities and move around indoors. Horses and donkeys are affectionate herd animals who respond well to human guidance and enjoy being in the presence of people, and their impact as therapy animals comes from both the novelty many people find in their presence, and the deep sense of connection they seem to have with humans.

"Horses have the innate character qualities and sensitivities that make them outstanding AAI partners," says Linda Woods, a mini horse handler in Texas. "Horses sense your feelings, often before you are aware of them, and react to those feelings. This is not a trained behavior, it just happens. The intuitiveness allows the animal to focus in on that one individual needing intervention the most."

Therapy horse candidates need to be prepared from a young age to accept a lot of touch and deal with new experiences and noisy settings. "The

greatest challenge is choosing a horse with the right characteristics that require them to be the center of attention," says Woods. "We like to start training from the earliest possible age. The training is always ongoing, as it seems there is always something new to encounter." A calm temperament is especially important for therapy equines; they need to be able to handle unexpected circumstances without shying, kicking, or bucking. Horses that will visit indoors need to be comfortable walking on floors and around furniture and equipment.

Equines have a special place as therapy animals. Their natural intuitiveness combined with the special experience of seeing a horse, pony, or donkey makes a therapy equine visit a special event. Woods says, "We witness these results at each visit. Many report that their day has been filled with doctor visits, therapy, procedures, and exhausting activities. When they enter the presence of the horse they are struck with awe, wonderment, and surprise. It is MAGIC and an experience not to forget."

### Rabbits and Guinea Pigs (Cavies)

Many people are familiar with these cuddly, gentle pets, and they're readily welcomed as therapy animals. Pet Partners currently has around 150 teams with these species registered. Although they are different species, there are a number of similarities in how they behave and how they're handled as therapy animals.

Cavies, commonly known as guinea pigs, are rodents, larger than mice and rats but small enough to hold. They're social and inquisitive, and can bond strongly with humans and learn to enjoy petting. They are frequently very vocal; a happy guinea pig will whistle and purr. During

visits they will typically rest calmly in a bed or basket and allow people to pet them. Because of their size they need to be handled gently, which makes them well-suited to quiet, structured visits. And some clients might not be comfortable with them due to negative perceptions of rodents.

Rabbits come in a range of sizes, from dwarf breeds that are small enough to sit in a person's hands to large breeds that can weigh 15 pounds or more. They're curious animals that enjoy socializing and can build bonds with humans and even other animals. Happy, comfortable rabbits will flop to show they're at ease and might bump humans with their chins or noses. They prefer having something solid under them so they frequently visit in beds or baskets.

Because they're perceived as non-threatening and are on the smaller side, both rabbits and guinea pigs are good therapy animals for people who might find larger animals intimidating. They're often particularly welcomed by children, and both species have seen great success in Read With Me™ visits—they make a great audience for children to read to!

Because they are small prey animals, they're highly watchful and can be apprehensive in new situations, and may hide discomfort to prevent vulnerability. While a comfortable animal might sit quietly without moving

around too much, a rabbit or guinea pig that freezes is uncomfortable or frightened, and handlers need to be very attuned to when their pets are stressed. Clients need guidance in petting these animals, since their size can make them vulnerable if petted too roughly. They need to wear harness and leash during visits, which can present a challenge in training them to become therapy animals.



*Button the rabbit and her dog pal Mokie during a visit*

Krista Renta, a Pet Partners handler and team evaluator in southern California, has been registered with multiple rabbits and guinea pigs, and has seen the effects both species can have, as well as the unique qualities of each. Her first therapy rabbit, Button, was bold and energetic and loved connecting with others. "She was an expert at cuddling. I called her the Cuddle Queen," says Renta. Button would often make therapy visits



*Mini horse Hope brightens a client's day*



*Handler Patti Anderson and her guinea pig Munchkin take part in Read With Me*



alongside dogs with complete comfort, increasing the impact of the visits.

Her experience with guinea pigs began with a brown-and-gold fellow she named Snickers. "I quickly realized he was very special," she says. "He was the embodiment of unconditional love. Wherever he went with me, everyone was completely enchanted by his presence." Through Snickers, she learned about how pets other than cats and dogs can extend affection and compassion to people, and that opened the world of AAI for her. "It was as if his little body couldn't hold the massive gentle spirit he exuded," she says. "No words are adequate to describe how supremely lucky I was to share my life with him."

## Rats

Domestic rats might be one of the most surprising species to be used as therapy animals, but they're well-suited to the role. The number of registered Pet Partners rat teams is only in the single digits, but those teams have a unique impact with those they visit.

Rats are very social creatures with high intelligence, and socialize readily to humans. They do carry some social stigma as people sometimes don't understand the difference between domestic rats and the wild species viewed as pests. But domestic rats are very fastidious, and

human socialization along with their intelligence leads to therapy animals who enjoy interacting with people.

Abby Chesnut is a rat handler and advocate in northwest Georgia who has taken on the mission of bringing therapy rats to more people. "Seeing faces light up when they see a rat is the best feeling," she says. "Not many people get to see a rat out in public and a therapy rat on top of that. Their uniqueness is an icebreaker."

Rats are small and need very gentle handling. Rats typically visit in a bed or basket, which allows the handler to support the animal and provide them a space where they feel safe. Like all registered Pet Partners therapy animals, they need to wear harness and leash during visits, so this needs to be part of their preparation for AAI. A rat will show discomfort through audible vocalizations and tense body language, which an experienced handler will recognize. A comfortable rat will have a relaxed body and will be fairly quiet.

The biggest drawback with therapy rats is the public perception. "People are still very wary of rats," says Chesnut. "We've been denied access to hospitals and some schools because of personal opinions and rat stigma." She also notes that the short lifespan of rats is a challenge. "They only live 2-3 years and this is very hard for both the



*Willow the therapy pig enjoyed playing games with clients*

handler and the people you visit." Training and preparing a rat for visiting typically takes 6 months or more, so the time a rat has for visiting might only last a year.

Even so, Chesnut cherishes working with her therapy rats. At an event with her first therapy rat, Oliver, they had the opportunity to visit with some special clients. "A young boy in a wheelchair who was visually impaired came by and his mom helped him pet Oliver. The biggest smile spread on the boy's face! It was such a sweet moment," she recalls. She and her current rat, Vincent, participate in Read With Me at a local library. "Vincent loves to be talked to and to sit in his basket, so the reading program has been a perfect fit for him. I've seen a major improvement in our regular readers' confidence and eagerness to read."

Rats will likely never be a high-number therapy species, but they definitely have a place in AAI. "We have been able to show others that rats aren't so bad," says Chesnut. "I get many comments like 'I didn't know rats could be this cute!' or 'I don't hate rats anymore.' It's really heartwarming that we can help change that negative association."

## Mini Pigs

The notion of a pig as a therapy animal can seem comical. But pot-bellied pigs (sometimes called miniature pigs) are highly intelligent,

take well to training, and can be very affectionate. Pet Partners has only a few therapy pig teams registered at present, but those who receive a therapy pig visit aren't likely to forget it.

Pet Partners handler and team evaluator Sherry Eddy, located in Minnesota, worked with a therapy pig named Willow. "Willow was a gentle, friendly pig and loved interacting with people," she says. "Pigs are easy to housetrain, adaptable given the right social experiences at a young age and can be very social and amicable. They can be taught polite behaviors and many structured skills; I find they are a good animal model for many different contexts in AAI."

Therapy pigs still face some misconceptions; many people think of pigs as dirty or likely to bite, and are reluctant to have them visit. Pigs are in fact very clean animals, and the required grooming standards for Pet Partners therapy animals reinforces that. Proper training and socialization reduce food aggression and risk of biting—in many ways this isn't much different from preparing dogs with these tendencies for therapy animal work. Socialization to humans from a young age is important, and overall obedience training is a must. Fortunately pigs respond well to positive training.

"Training Willow was like training one of my dogs,"



*Vincent the rat enjoys reading with children!*

says Eddy. “She was bright and eager to learn and of course very food motivated! She was the easiest animal to house train.” Because pigs are highly intelligent, Eddy was also able to train Willow in some specific skills, such as waiting for treats and vocalizing on cue, as well as the kinds of experiences Willow could expect when visiting. “I used target training to give Willow the confidence to cross a floor she was uncertain of or to walk into an elevator with confidence or to position herself between two wheelchairs. She would follow the target (a thick wooden dowel with black tape on the end of it) and receive a reward when getting to her goal area.”

Eddy’s memorable experiences visiting with Willow included working with students in special education classes who got to know how great Willow was, and delighting seniors with dementia who weren’t expecting a pig to visit them. “Pigs are a great animal model to expose and break down stereotypes and misplaced judgment,” says Eddy. “Once people get over that it is a pig and they understand the pig is friendly, I can guide them in positive ways to interact with her and the client will show the same enthusiasm as they do with a dog.”

## Birds

Many people are aware that birds in the parrot family are extremely social and intelligent, capable of learning language and complex problem solving. With these traits, they are in many ways a natural fit for AAI. Pet Partners currently has seven teams with parrot species registered (along with one dove team), and we look forward to adding more.

All other species Pet Partners registers are mammals, so birds present some unique considerations for behavior

and evaluation. Their body language is very different and can be challenging to read for people not familiar with them. They also tend to be very wary of new situations. Bird handlers invest a lot of time in learning their birds’ personalities, building a bond with their birds, and socializing their birds for the contact and human interaction they’ll experience as therapy animals. This is why birds must live and work with their handlers for at least a year before registration, compared to the six months required for other species.

But birds offer a special form of interaction, in part because they are so different from mammals. People are fascinated by their behavior and beautiful coloring, and they enjoy the opportunity to interact with an animal that can fly. The intelligence shown by parrot species draws us in; we aren’t expecting an animal that can speak like we do and engage with us in learning. These characteristics make birds especially compelling for many people. And AAI can provide these highly social birds with enrichment and engagement they need to be healthy and happy.

One thing many therapy bird handlers say is that the process of training their birds is often about them being trained in turn. Dan Lee, an Arizona handler who



*Buddy the macaw reads with a student*

works with a macaw named Buddy, says his bird led him towards what was compelling for Buddy, which is reading programs. Buddy loves listening to children read and following the rhythm of their words, and Lee channeled that into Buddy taking part in Read With Me visits.

Krista Renta conducted an evaluation for the team of Joni Blank Malukas and her blue-crowned conure Tango and was fascinated by how they interacted, saying “Tango



*Krista Renta and her parrot Flynn*

was leading Joni on how to handle her for each part of the exam.” Renta was so moved by this special relationship that she decided to become a bird handler herself and now works with a blue-headed pionus named Flynn. “I was humble enough to follow his lead,” she says of training and preparing Flynn. She and Flynn now often visit along with Blank Malukas and Tango, increasing the impact these therapy birds can have. Flynn has shown her how his special personality helps people with energy and mood issues improve those challenges. “I have a miracle parrot,” she says.

## Llamas and Alpacas

Who would ever have expected a llama visiting at an assisted living facility or a camp? But they do, and Pet Partners helps make that happen. The number of registered llama and alpaca teams is small, only double digits, but their impact is large.

Llamas and alpacas are related

species; llamas are heavier and taller, with long ears and faces, while alpacas have shorter legs, more blunt faces, and small ears. Originally from mountain environments, they have a natural ability to step lightly, which is helpful for them as therapy animals that visit indoors. They have a watchful nature, and an ability to gauge people’s emotional state, which allows them to connect with people who can benefit from their presence.

Niki Kuklenski is a llama breeder and handler in Washington state, and was an early innovator in using llamas for AAI. She first registered with Pet Partners (then Delta Society) in 2006. “Llamas are so intuitive and they literally read a situation and adjust to what is going on,” she says. “I love the wicked intelligence most hold and ease of training them for virtually anything... they are adaptable.” The size of llamas makes them a good option for clients who have restricted mobility, such as people in residential care and hospice; the llamas can lean down for people to pet them and give hugs.

Llamas and alpacas should be prepared for therapy work from an early age. Choosing the right individuals to become therapy animals is critical, and it’s important not to ask animals to visit for too long, especially when young. “If you force them to do too much visiting, they burn out,” says Kuklenski. Because llamas are prey animals, they might hide their discomfort or stress. Making fewer visits and shorter visits helps ensure they don’t become stressed and will be successful at visiting. And Kuklenski emphasizes that the llamas are present for a specific purpose and have limits: “These are therapy animals, not a circus act. I think it is important not to treat my animals like a sideshow and respect them for the work they do.”



## Evaluating Other Species

One of the most common questions Pet Partners receives about species other than dogs is how the evaluation is done. The structure of the evaluation is fundamentally similar for all species, since it gauges the skills and aptitude of all teams in a typical AAI visit. But we do have behavioral-specific considerations for each species.

Dogs are evaluated on basic obedience skills such as sit, stay, down, and come when called. These skills aren't necessarily appropriate for cats and pocket pets; instead, those species will be evaluated on how well they stay when moved between three people. Equines and llamas/alpacas will be asked to stay, but they will also be evaluated on their ability to back up, since they might need to back out of a room.

Birds will be asked to stay in place as well as move among three people, and evaluated for their peck response. And pigs can be trained to many of the same skills as dogs, including stay and come when called, but also require a specific evaluation of how they react to scents.

All species are evaluated on situations such as meeting a friendly stranger; responding to awkward touching, hugging, and petting by multiple people; unexpected noises and yelling; response to a neutral dog; and presence of enticing items such as food or a toy. All therapy animals should ideally be capable of responding calmly or ignoring the situation, or else recovering quickly and continuing with minimal stress, as appropriate to their species.

Llamas can have differing temperaments, but they should all be comfortable with being touched, handled, and on a lead, as well as transport. Their individual characteristics will become apparent through training. "They tend to be stoic and reserved when required but will also read people and rise to the occasion," says Kuklenski. "My llamas all have different traits that I utilize depending on where I visit." And she makes sure that any therapy llama has the right training to avoid a notorious llama characteristic. "Everyone always has the same reaction: 'They are going to spit on you!' I always giggle

as that is about as silly as assuming every dog is going to bite you."

The unique characteristics of llamas and alpacas, and the rarity of interacting with them, has a particularly special impact for those they visit. Kuklenski recalls a visit with a hospice client who made a special request to meet her llama Marisco. "I brought Marisco in and immediately they had a connection. She literally sat gazing up at him for over an hour. Petting him and talking to him while the whole world passed her by. I will forever remember her gazing up at him in total happiness and love."

### Bringing the best to people who can benefit

Every therapy animal is special, and everyone who visits with a therapy animal gets something special from that interaction. Pet Partners is so grateful for every handler and every animal that registers with our Therapy Animal Program, and we're pleased we're able to offer safe and effective visits from a number of species. We would love to bring more of the uncommon therapy animals to people. We hope to do this by encouraging more handlers of

these species to register with Pet Partners, and licensing more team evaluators who have the experience to work with species other than dogs.

No matter the species, the smiles and sense of comfort people get from visiting with

a Pet Partners therapy animal are the heart of our mission. Bringing more therapy animal visits to more people is our ultimate goal, and we'll continue to work with the best therapy animal teams there are, of all nine types.



Marisco and his special touch

## NOW AVAILABLE



Your favorite Pet Partners publications are now available anywhere eBooks are sold.

Visit: [www.books2read.com/ap/nBMEKR/Pet-Partners](http://www.books2read.com/ap/nBMEKR/Pet-Partners)

Available at any of these digital stores:







## RESEARCH FOCUS

# Expanding AAI Research Beyond Therapy Dogs

A vast majority of the existing research on animal-assisted interventions focuses on our canine partners as the therapy animals who are involved in empirical investigations. However, the healing power of the human-animal bond can be noted in relationships with all kinds of species, and more and more studies are shifting focus to consider a larger variety of therapy animals.

In a study<sup>1</sup> conducted in 2014 by Dr. Maggie O'Haire, guinea pigs took center stage, offering animal-assisted activities in 41 different classrooms in Australia. The children who participated in this study had all been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder,



Heather Hauser and Rapunzel

and they were a part of an eight-week program that allowed for sixteen 20-minute sessions with the guinea pigs. Over the course of the study, the children who interacted with the guinea pigs displayed significant improvements in

social functioning, including increased social skills, and decreased social withdrawal. Another interesting finding of this study was that over half of the students' parents reported that their children seemed more interested in going to school when they had furry friends there to interact with them in the classroom!

At Pet Partners we hear so many stories about the healing nature of all nine of the types of animals we register. Teams such as Heather Hauser and her therapy guinea pig Rapunzel affirm findings like the ones from Dr. O'Haire's study. In their work visiting with cancer patients in Kentucky, Heather and Rapunzel have brought comfort to so many during some of life's most challenging times. This team made such an impact while visiting with a

patient with late-stage cancer that they were even invited to be a part of his memorial service after he passed away from the disease. Stories like these speak to the immense power of this intervention, showing that no matter the therapy animal (big or small!), sharing the love of our pets makes an impressive difference in so many peoples' lives.

<sup>1</sup>O'Haire, M. E., McKenzie, S. J., McCune, S., & Slaughter, V. (2014). Effects of classroom animal-assisted activities on social functioning in children with autism spectrum disorder. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 20(3), 162-168.

## 2018 Magic Award Recipient: Jennifer VonLintel



Pet Partners is pleased to introduce the recipient of the 2018 Magic Award, Jennifer VonLintel. The Magic Award is a scholarship established by Dr. Aubrey Fine, chair of the Pet Partners Human-Animal Bond Advisory Board, to assist a Pet Partners volunteer in continuing their professional development in animal-assisted interventions. Jennifer was chosen as the 2018 recipient based on her work applying and improving animal-assisted interventions in schools as part of her role as a school counselor.

Jennifer was introduced to AAI through a research study conducted at the school where she worked. Jennifer and a

therapy dog team met with one of a set of twins, while the other twin met with a social worker. After just two sessions, the student meeting with the therapy dog team displayed increased empathy and had fewer office referrals compared to the twin not working with the team. "The positive changes in that student that occurred over the next several weeks made me determined to learn more about this work," says Jennifer.

Jennifer and her golden retriever Copper have been a registered Pet Partners team since 2015, and work together at her school. "I have a passion for working with kids who have tough backgrounds," says Jennifer. She is building a trauma-informed canine-assisted intervention (CAI) program to assist students who have experienced trauma. "My CAI has sessions for sensory issues and social skills but I think the heart of the intervention is its ties into building the relationship with the classroom teacher, peers and, if applicable, a family member. I'm modifying the

sessions as I work through them and collecting data. I hope to eventually have a curriculum that other school counselors can replicate." Her work in schools with canine-assisted interventions has led her to focus on the standards and best practices for these programs. "I have always tried to read everything I could about this modality and ensure my program was using best practices. Over time I started to hear about programs that were not using best practice. I was concerned about the risks to all involved but I have been very concerned about the dogs. The school setting is a very sensory-rich and complex environment. There are many programs that have dogs in the schools all day, five days a week. Some programs do not even have an identified handler."

Jennifer started a website, School Therapy Dogs, to bring more attention to best practices for CAI in schools and to provide resources for others using AAI in school settings. She also hosts

a Facebook group where members can ask questions, get resources, share research, and hopefully build stronger, more ethical programs.

It was this focus on welfare, standards, and ethical practice that led to Jennifer receiving the 2018 Magic Award. She is using the award to enroll in the Canine Assisted Intervention Specialist Certificate through the Institute for Human-Animal Connection at Denver University. "The Magic Award allows me to further explore what is best practice in our schools with the focus being on the care and well-being of our canines," she says. "My goal is to deepen my knowledge of canines and how their needs can be a foundation for animal-assisted interventions in a school setting and then share that work with others."

Congratulations to Jennifer, and thanks to her and Copper for all their work!

Visit Jennifer's website [School Therapy Dogs at schooltherapydogs.org](http://SchoolTherapyDogs.org).



## FIELD RELATIONS

Pet Partners continues to evolve and grow. We are excited to announce we have added an incredible team of new staff at the community level by forming the first round of Pet Partners state chapters! These chapters will offer additional support to volunteers, facilities, and the community at large by expanding on the existing resources available from our International Headquarters in Bellevue, WA.

This new direction for Pet Partners reflects our commitment to our volunteers and our mission. We know that community engagement not only leads to higher levels of volunteer satisfaction, but also allows our teams to focus more on sharing the love of their pets with the world around them. Staff in these chapter locations will help spread the news about what Pet Partners teams do, and they'll also help streamline the logistical challenges associated with Therapy Animal Program mission delivery.

Pet Partners is starting this new direction with the formation of four chapters in 2019. These locations include Arizona, Southern California, Illinois, and North Texas. Our work in this first round of chapter development will not only bring more therapy animal visits to a larger and more diverse population, but will also help staff at the headquarters level serve our volunteers and our mission better as we learn the best ways to support our teams all around the world.

*Taylor Johnson, PhD, and Jackie Vasquez-Theodorakis, National Directors of Field Relations*

### Eastern Section Highlight: Pet Partners of Greater Atlanta

“Working together as a community helps volunteers feel motivated, supported, and also holds us all accountable to maintaining best practices,” says Gina Fisher. Gina wears many hats as a Pet Partners volunteer! On top of being a handler, team evaluator, and the leader of Pet Partners of Greater Atlanta (PPGA), Gina is also a doctoral student who researches therapy animal handlers’ motivation to volunteer. Working with other volunteers in her community has benefitted both her research and her own volunteering.



*Pet Partners of Greater Atlanta leadership team: (L to R) Sean Kochitzky, Lisa Myers, Heather Uptonson, Steve Ray, Rosie O’Neill, Angelena Ledford, and Gina Fisher*

Realizing the power of coming together with a shared passion, this group of Atlanta handlers has gained major traction to better serve their community, while also supporting one another through the ups and downs of volunteerism. Over the past year, Pet Partners of Greater Atlanta has worked on dividing and conquering, appointing volunteer leaders to focus on objectives such as facility relations, social media representation, and volunteer appreciation. Along with streamlining these logistical considerations, this group has formed close relationships by coming together with their shared love for therapy animals.

*continued on page 11*

### Western Section Highlight: Utah Pet Partners

Hearts are not generally happy when a young person is summoned to court. Sometimes this is a new experience and sometimes it’s business as usual; sometimes their eyes dart around in anticipation and other times the expression is disinterested. Then they see the therapy dog and a tail starts to wag as the dog senses the connection.

Each case is different, but the common denominator is the dog that makes the child feel special and cared about because



*Sophie, Pet Partner of Pauline Bennett*

it is there just for them. These dogs are happy to sit quietly with a child that needs the comfort of a warm, cuddly friend, or sometimes they interact when the child asks them to give a high five. Regardless of the circumstances, the juvenile is not alone and has a nonjudgmental friend to walk with them through what is often a very stressful situation.

The dogs are specifically requested for juveniles who the court believes would be a good match for this experience. The dogs provide comfort before, during, and after a hearing or bench trial situation. Feedback from these situations has been heartwarming. The atmosphere seems to lighten as a polite and friendly dog enters the scene. A mother once mentioned her daughter doesn’t need to be in restraints when she can have a dog accompany her to court.

Sometimes the feedback is instantaneous as you see a child turn their trust to this furry companion and for a little while

*continued on page 11*





ADVOCATE

## New Advocacy Resources

Everything you need to advocate for therapy animals and the human-animal bond is now available at [petpartners.org/advocacy](http://petpartners.org/advocacy). View our Advocacy Bootcamp webinar and download our guide to help in communicating with legislators or hosting

your own therapy animal demonstration for a policy maker. We've also provided talking points and a leave-behind resource to support your interactions with legislators. While you're there, you can take action on our latest online advocacy actions as well.

### Your Advocacy Matters

On December 20, 2018 the Farm Bill was signed into law, which included the Pet and Women Safety (PAWS) Act that provides funding to expand the availability of pet-friendly shelters and housing assistance for the companion

animals of domestic violence victims. It also expands federal law to include protections for pets in interstate restraining orders. Pet Partners advocates played a role in passing this important law. Thanks to all of our advocates for your efforts!

## Smart Planning for Charitable Contributions in 2019

Do you want to be better prepared for the next tax season? It's not too soon to consider ways to optimize your giving strategies in 2019 to take advantage of what is allowable by law while supporting nonprofit organizations.

Consider what other savvy people are doing when it comes to charitable giving: Donate assets to Pet Partners through a traditional individual retirement account (IRA). It may be more advantageous to you than writing a check.

### How does it work?

If you have an IRA and you are 70½ or older, it is mandatory to take a required minimum distribution (RMD) each year. You can transfer money to a charity when you take your RMD. This withdrawal works for those who itemize as well as non-itemizers.

Donating part of your RMD to a charity will help keep the RMD out of your adjusted gross income, and it also has an added benefit of helping you stay below the income tax level for taxes and Medicare.

You need to be 70½ and the funds must be transferred directly from the IRA to a qualified charity, otherwise it won't be considered as a qualified charitable deduction.

Because of the life-changing work our volunteers do, Pet Partners is expanding in 2019 by opening four new chapters nationwide. This will enable Pet Partners to better meet the growing requests from facilities who would like visits from our animal therapy teams and provide necessary support to our dedicated volunteers. By making a donation in 2019 through

your IRA to Pet Partners, you will support this growth and benefit your tax situation.

Be ahead of the curve for tax planning this year by considering this smart gifting opportunity. For a sample letter you may provide to your IRA custodian, contact Mary Bohmke, [maryb@petpartners.org](mailto:maryb@petpartners.org), or call 425-679-5502.

*This information is not intended to provide legal or financial advice. Please contact your financial advisor to learn if this is an appropriate action for your situation.*

*continued from page 10*

### Eastern Section Highlight...

"As someone whom has volunteered all my life, I have never been a part of such a supportive and enthusiastic group of volunteers. Whether it is congratulating a team member for a personal life achievement or being there for a team who just had a difficult visit, this Atlanta group supports each other," says Sean Kochtitzky, member of PPGA.

When asked what keeps this group of volunteers committed not only to therapy animal visits, but also to meeting frequently to discuss their progress, Gina says, "We all just dream of a day when no person is denied the opportunity to visit with a therapy animal, and until we get there, we'll all keep doing the best we can and increasing our impact."

*continued from page 10*

### Western Section Highlight...

escape the emotion of a hard situation. It's also an equalizer for courtroom staff who seem far more warm and approachable as they join in petting and talking to the dog.

Therapy dogs in the courtroom have proven to be a win-win situation so far for clients, visitors, and staff. Dogs don't have boundaries where love is concerned.

**Note from Debbie Carr, UPP Director:** In order to avoid potential problems associated with juries, our Court Therapy Dog teams are present only for hearings and bench trials. Our handlers and leaders meet with interested judges before the program starts in a particular district to make sure all are on the same page concerning our limitations, policies and procedures. Each district is asked to write up their own policies and procedures, usually using Pet Partners policies and procedures as a template. We have provided extra instruction and resources for our volunteers concerning self-care and avoidance of secondary trauma in their work with Dr. Janelle Nimer of the Utah Animal-Assisted Healing Center. The program was presented at the Utah State Conference of Guardians Ad Litem and CASA volunteers in 2018.

Utah Pet Partners involved in the Court Therapy Dog program include Dion Dostaler (unleashed), Krissy Erickson & Blue, Vickie King with Megan & Matt, Paulette Bennett & Sophie, De Voeller & Annie, Kari Dutson & Penny, Linda Webster & Lucy, Melissa Lipani & Tuggy, and Jill Watts & Reuben.



## PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

- Pet Partners teams joined our friends with **Farmers Insurance** at their mobile relief center in Albany, GA to help people affected by Hurricane Michael. Teams were onsite for several days, bringing the

comforting presence of therapy animals to one of the areas hit by this devastating hurricane. We're grateful to our teams in southwest Georgia for helping their community, and to Farmers for supporting the vital work of Pet Partners teams.



*Teams: Betty Livingston & Schatzi, Paula Patterson & Abbie, Rachel Dorough & Elvis*

- The **Mars Petcare** team knows all about the amazing health benefits of walking with pets! Several Mars Petcare humans and pets got together to participate in our World's Largest Pet Walk last September.



- Kudos to our **Workplace Well-being companies**, such as Aetna and Intel, and a huge thank you to thousands of Pet Partners handlers who make workplace well-being visits with their wonderful therapy animals, such as Gertie, pictured here at a popular event we held at Google.



## BARK and Pet Partners teamed up to spread holiday cheer!

Pet Partners is grateful to have been selected by BARK's social impact program, BARK For Good, to receive some very special holiday treats.

Thousands of our registered therapy dogs received a special gift box from BARK containing festive holiday treats and toys. Pet Partners was one of a few best-in-class nonprofit organizations to be included in this special celebration. BARK wanted to recognize and show gratitude to dogs across the country that work



hard to make the world a better place. In addition to supporting Pet Partners therapy dogs, the promotion also recognized other canine heroes such as guide dogs and search & rescue dogs.

Thank you BARK for celebrating Pet Partners!

- We are thrilled to be the recipient of a \$25,000 **Petco Foundation Helping Heroes grant award!** The funding will be used to strengthen our Therapy Animal Program and reach more people through our efforts.



- Pet Partners was a proud charity partner of the **2018 American Humane Hero Dog Awards**. Congratulations to the many Pet Partners finalists who were recognized in the Therapy Animal category, and a huge thank you to the thousands of Pet Partners supporters whose votes helped us to receive a generous \$7500 donation.







# CONFERENCE

PARTNERING WITH A PURPOSE

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2019 ★ SAN ANTONIO, TX

## JOIN US SEPTEMBER 20-21

@ the San Antonio Marriott Rivercenter  
in San Antonio, Texas for the 2019  
**Pet Partners Conference.**

- ✔ Celebrate your passion for AAI
- ✔ Hear from leaders in the field
- ✔ Network with handlers and AAT practitioners

And, with three tracks of breakout sessions, conference attendees will hear from leading voices in AAI including:

- Dr. Aubrey Fine
- Dr. Sandy Barker
- Dr. Nancy Gee
- Dr. Leslie Stewart
- Dr. Zenny Ng
- Dr. Cynthia Chandler
- Dr. Megan Mueller
- Melissa Winkle
- Steve Dale
- Colleen Pelar and more!

Introducing  
**VICTORIA  
STILWELL**

Keynote Speaker  
world-renowned dog trainer  
best known as the star  
of the international  
hit TV series

**It's Me or the Dog**



At this year's conference, *Partnering with a Purpose*, we look forward to partnering with you just as you partner with your therapy animals to bring comfort, healing, and joy to others.

For registration information, visit:

[www.PetPartners.org/conference](http://www.PetPartners.org/conference) |      



## EVENTS

### National Therapy Animal Day is April 30!



## Pet Partners®

NATIONAL THERAPY ANIMAL DAY

- April 30, 2019 -

National Therapy Animal Day was created by Pet Partners to recognize all of the exceptional therapy animals who partner with their human companions to bring comfort and healing to those in need. Therapy animals and their handlers can be found helping people of all ages in a variety of settings including hospitals, pediatric care units, schools, and assisted living facilities.

#### Goals of National Therapy Animal Day

- Recognize and honor therapy animals.
- Raise awareness and educate the public about the role therapy animals play in enhancing the health and well-being of humans.
- Honor the thousands of dedicated handlers (the human members of therapy animal teams) who volunteer their time and compassion to bring therapy animals to their communities.

#### What can I do?

- Join us in raising awareness of National Therapy Animal Day by participating in Treats &

Sweets Day during the month of April.

- Work with your local officials to have April 30 officially proclaimed Therapy Animal Day in your town, county, or state! Visit our website for a sample proclamation and tips.
- Contact your local media and suggest a “good news” story about National Therapy Animal Day and how therapy animals are making your community a healthier and happier place. Visit our website for a “letter to the editor” template to get started.
- Become a Pet Partners advocate and use your voice to expand access to the human-animal bond and gain a seat at the policymaking table.
- Show your support on social media on April 30 by sharing our special Pet Partners posts, and by posting your own photos and stories of you with your favorite therapy animals. Make sure to use the hashtags [#NationalTherapyAnimalDay](#) and [#PetPartners](#).

Visit [petpartners.org/ntad](http://petpartners.org/ntad) for info and resources!

### Calling all Pet Partners Supporters: Treats & Sweets Day is a piece of cake to celebrate!

In honor of National Therapy Animal Day coming up on April 30, folks all over the country will be *baking* the world a better place by participating in Treats & Sweets Day for Pet Partners. Join us to bring pets and people together in the sweetest way!



Your efforts support thousands of therapy animal teams who make millions of life-enhancing visits each year. Learn more and sign up at [treatsandsweetsday.org](http://treatsandsweetsday.org).

Participants will receive a free Baker Start-Up Kit in

the mail, which includes stickers, a poster, and a table sign. Other decorations and templates can be downloaded at [treatsandsweetsday.org](http://treatsandsweetsday.org). Bakers who raise \$100 or more will receive our official Treats & Sweets Day t-shirt!

#### SAVE THE DATE!

### Second Annual World's Largest Pet Walk for Pet Partners

Saturday, September 28, 2019



Don't miss this official Pet Partners walking event, in celebration of our Walk With Me™ initiative!

#### How does it work?

You and your pet(s) can walk at any time on Saturday, September 28, 2019. Walk whatever distance feels right for you and your animal, and choose any location! Whether you lead a Walk With Me event in your community, host a workplace event, gather some friends and family for a casual stroll around the block, or take a nature hike that's just you and your animal, we want to see our Pet Partners community taking steps with their pets. All pets who enjoy a walk are welcome—pledged

walkers for the first World's Largest Pet Walk included cats, mini horses, and a steer!

#### It's so simple to take part!

This is an open event—everyone who wants to walk with a pet is welcome! There's no fee required to participate, but we do invite you to set up an individual or team fundraising page (coming soon!). And we ask that you share your photos with us and spread the word on social media.

An official walking bib will be available for you to print at home, commemorative event shirts will go on sale this summer, and those who fundraise will be eligible for some fun incentives.

Look for more information in email and social media, and visit [petpartners.org](http://petpartners.org) later this year for details. Join us and demonstrate the benefits of walking with pets!

[#WorldsLargestPetWalk](#)  
[#PetPartners](#)



# Letters to the Editor

**Q** *I've been hearing about visits in my community that are coordinated through Pet Partners HQ. Is this a new offering? How can I get involved?*

**A:** Under our Caring Companies banner, Pet Partners builds relationships with companies and organizations to bring Pet Partners therapy animal teams to workplaces, special events, and post-crisis relief sites. These visits are a way for Pet Partners to expand the impact and awareness of therapy animals and our mission, and also provides financial support for Pet Partners that enables us to better support our teams.

These visits include our animal-assisted workplace well-being (AAWW) initiative, which helps reduce stress and improve employee well-being in the workplace; Comfort Corners and outreach at events such as conferences, giving teams the opportunity to introduce new audiences to therapy animals and the Pet Partners mission; and visits alongside insurance companies to provide comfort to people who have experienced loss and damage after natural disasters.

Visits are coordinated by the Pet Partners Strategic Partnerships Manager, who works with interested organizations to set up the visits, and then coordinates with Pet Partners volunteers in the geographic area of the visit to schedule teams. This helps make the experience of scheduling easy and smooth for everyone.

Many teams have found that taking part in these visits provides new options for visiting they hadn't previously considered, and new experiences of visiting. Handlers who have done AAWW visits say they appreciate the affection and attention their pets receive—everyone is always happy to see them and lavish attention on them! Many handlers really enjoy the outreach aspect of special events, giving them the chance to meet new people and spread the word about Pet Partners and the vital service our teams provide. And teams who participate

in post-disaster comfort visits are deeply moved by the opportunity to support their neighbors and their communities in times of crisis.

We're always looking for teams to take part in these visits! Handlers who



want to receive notice about these visits just need to make sure that their mailing preferences through the Volunteer Center are set to receive Pet Partners emails and volunteer requests. Not all areas will have these visits available, and visits might not be available to some species. However, the more teams that are interested in these visits, the more likely it is that a visit can happen in your area.

Companies and organizations interested in being part of Caring Companies are encouraged to get in touch with us to learn more. Therapy animal visits can provide benefits in so many environments, and we're happy to work with you to bring these benefits to your organization. Email [katiek@petpartners.org](mailto:katiek@petpartners.org) for more information.

**Q** *I'm a handler interested in setting up visits with a facility in my area. Do I need to go through Pet Partners to do this?*

**A:** No. Pet Partners knows that engagement with their local community is one of the most important aspects for volunteers. Handlers will have the best idea of what facilities in their area are looking for from therapy animal visits, and the ability to make a connection with a facility in person is very valuable. For this reason we don't require volunteers to coordinate visits or visiting programs through us. We want volunteers to have the flexibility to choose where to visit and what kinds of facilities are of interest to them.

Any Pet Partners volunteer is welcome to approach a facility to inquire about visiting or starting a program. Many facilities are eager to have therapy animal visits when they learn it's available to them. Pet Partners provides some guidance for volunteers in approaching facilities and getting started: Unit 6 of the Pet Partners Handler Guide has helpful information, and the Facility Types guide is also useful. Both guides are available in the Resource Library of the Volunteer Center. Handlers who are specifically interested in setting up Read With Me programs can make use of the Read With Me manual, available in the Resource Library of the Volunteer Center.

One of the goals of our new chapters, launching later this year, is to provide more community-level support for connecting volunteers and facilities. Handlers will still be able to choose their own visiting locations and take initiative in working with facilities to coordinate visiting programs. But communities with chapters will have additional support from Pet Partners staff in these activities.

***Do you have a question on a topic that would be of interest to a broad audience? Send it for consideration to [editor@petpartners.org](mailto:editor@petpartners.org). If you need an immediate response, please contact Pet Partners at [petpartners.org/contact-us](https://petpartners.org/contact-us).***

## Celebrate National Therapy Animal Day with Pet Partners!



April 30 is National Therapy Animal Day! Pet Partners is offering a new limited-edition shirt design: Ask Me About My Therapy Animal! Join us in celebrating the exceptional therapy animals who partner with their human companions to bring comfort and healing to those in need. Shirts come in a variety of styles, colors, and sizes, and are only available for order through April 7. To order yours, visit [petpartners.org](http://petpartners.org). Proceeds benefit Pet Partners.