

All About Pets: Therapy dogs bring lots and lots of smiles



Smiles All Around: (From left) Lana beams proudly as Jamie Rygiel cuddles with Sophie. Bailey is obviously delighted with the attention from Roxanne Hull as Leslie Bernard and Laure enjoy the scene. (Courtesy)



By Christy Powers, All About Pets Columnist

Originally Published: January 14, 2019 9:25 p.m.



Objective: To provide a positive social experience for YRMC patients.

Observing the Pet Therapy program at Yavapai Regional Medical Center very readily displays the positive effects that well trained and loving dogs can have, not just on the patients, but also on the staff who frequently work under a fair amount of pressure.

Eighteen to 20 dog and handler teams visit the hospital each week bringing smiles and a soft touch.

Patients can request to see a dog. Every patient is asked if he/she would like a visit before the dog is brought into the room. For many, being able to touch a furry coat and look into gentle eyes brings calmness.

Frequently, a hand will reach over or through the railing of the bed to make contact with the dog. That contact is what the patient seeks and is comfortable with and will remember after the visit is over.

Many of the patients, when seeing one of these visiting dogs, share their thoughts about missing their own dog, whether their dog is waiting for them at home or are dogs from their past.

The dogs love doing this work and they seem to have an innate sense of who needs a visit and how to respond. At home during play time, these dogs can be crazy puppies, but when the harness is put on, they are eager to interact with the patients. The dogs really love the interaction.

Those who have dedicated themselves to the training of these therapy dogs and have made the time commitment to the program, reap huge personal rewards. They stress that the gifts they receive from doing this volunteer work are unmeasurable.

They feel that the rewards they receive are as great as those of the people they visit.

Laure Zaffuto states - “We would not do this if we did not enjoy it. Nothing like making someone smile” Her furry Standard Poodle, Bailey, is a gentle love.

“I am delighted that the hospital provides this opportunity for us and for the patients.” states Lana Fielding. Sophie, her Soft Coat Wheaton Terrier, loves to snuggle if that is appropriate, but also is eager to be petted and share her beautiful eyes.

Many patients and visitors, on realizing the impact of these visiting dogs, want to know how to get involved in the program with their own dog.

Nancy Thomes, director of volunteer services, would be delighted to provide information to anyone interested in the program. She oversees the program on both YRMC campuses in Prescott and Prescott Valley. For a brochure and specific information about the program, she can be reached at 928-771-5552. Nancy summarizes: “We recognize the therapeutic benefits of these visits. Research has shown the benefits of pet interactions; Reduced anxiety for both patients and staff. For patients, these visits can lower blood pressure and provide a positive distraction.”

Service Dogs are carefully and thoroughly trained to provide a very specific service to an individual person, whether it be a physical, emotional or medical need. Therapy Dogs are carefully trained to bring smiles and comfort, relaxation and therapy to all the people they come in contact with while visiting a hospital, school. Detention center, senior care center, wherever they might go. They are specifically trained to provide gentle comfort to those who are in stressful, uncomfortable or frightening situations.

Dogs involved in the P.A.W.S. hospital program, Pets Are Warm Support, have been carefully trained and very carefully screened and tested to insure their reliability. Testing is done through Pet Partners, a national organization. Dogs must exhibit basic manners and obedience, a relaxed nature, non-aggressive behavior toward other dogs and not bothered by loud noises, wheel chairs, crutches and other equipment.

Laure and Lana agree - “It makes your day to see the faces light up as the dogs approach.”

Christy Powers is a freelance writer whose passion is studying and writing about pet health, nutrition and training. She can be reached at cpowerspak@gmail.com.

Sign up for Courier e-News Alerts

2019 CHEVROLET SONIC
SEDAN LT

OVER 18% OFF MSRP!

LAMB





SALE PRICE

\$15,995

MSRP \$19,645 • STK#C114093


CHEVROLET

SHOP NOW