

PET PARTNERS OF PRESCOTT BRINGS SMILES, EASES ANXIETIES

By Robin Layton



Ed Fielding, Laure Zaffuto and Bailey at a Yavapai Big Brothers Big Sisters event.

Bailey relaxes, his brown curly hair blowing in the wind, while his best friend and handler Laure Zaffuto shares a success tale of his most recent job.

"Bailey was given a special shout-out over the intercom at Taylor Hicks Elementary," said Laure.

Bailey, a 2-year-old Standard Poodle who is a therapy dog with Pet Partners of Prescott, is a

calming classroom influence while working with special education students at Taylor Hicks and the social worker at Taylor Hicks and Granite Mountain schools.

One young student said when she is angry, "Bailey really calms me down."

Reactions like that are at the heart of Pet Partners. "We want to make people happy," said Laure.

The local community partner of the national nonprofit Pet Partners is an all-volunteer group who work in volunteer teams -- one handler/one animal -- providing animal-assisted interactions.

Laure and Lana Fielding co-founded Pet Partners of Prescott in 2018. Lana shared they'd like to grow the number of volunteer teams to help more people.

Lana's partner, Tama, is a 2-year-old lab who volunteers with her at Abia Judd Elementary and Yavapai Regional Medical Center's West Campus. Another member of the group



Lana Fielding with her dog Tama and Aviation Day visitor Carla.

is Debbie Zdanowicz and her pet partner 6-year-old Irish Setter Megan. They participate in the Read with Me program at



Therapy dog Megan volunteers at Lincoln Elementary.

Megan's presence at the school allows kids to read aloud in a non-judgmental environment. She doesn't correct their pronunciation, and she is a great listener. The one-to-one interaction gives a reader more confidence.



Little Sister Maddy bonds with therapy dog Tama at Aviation Day.

The group recently attended Aviation Day at the Prescott Regional Airport, an event hosted by Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University flight program students for the children of Yavapai Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Little Brothers and Sisters petted the dogs, asked their names and gave them many hugs. Little Sister Maddy was enthralled with Tama, "he's so soft, and he loves me!"

All Pet Partners handlers complete training prior to registration and have access to continuing education opportunities.



The Pet Partners recently attended Aviation Day with Yavapai Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Lincoln Elementary and also volunteer at YRMC.

"Megan just loves the children," said Debbie. "I've seen a definite improvement in student reading skills and self confidence."

In addition to Read With Me, the teams also join in the Walk With Me program for seniors.

"The human-animal bond is so important," said Laure. "Not only are we helping children and seniors, we show people the day-to-day care of pets."

After completing the handler training and passing a 22-part evaluation, members take their pets to visit people

at assisted-living facilities, schools, shelters, hospitals, hospices, libraries, and more.

There are certain skills that make a dog a good therapy animal: Sitting and lying down on cue, coming when called, being calm, and being non-reactive to other animals are a few. Therapy animals should also enjoy going to new places, meeting people, and being petted.

To be an effective member of a team, the handlers must also have people skills and be able to anticipate their partner's responses, behaviors and positions.

For pet owners who are interested in Pet Partners, information on the program is available at petpartners.org and: www.facebook.com/groups/PP.Prescott.

Call (253) 677-7916 or (928) 308-2556 or email ppofprescott@gmail.com for more information.



Little Sister Jubilee meets Tucker, a therapy dog with Pet Partners of Prescott. White is Tucker's handler.

DID YOU KNOW?

Therapy animals can:

- Bring smiles and lift spirits
- Lessen depression
- Provide warmth to chemo patients
- Alleviate a person's pain
- Assist with learning
- Reduce loneliness or boredom
- Provide motivation to do therapy
- Reduce blood pressure
- Lower anxiety and stress

Service vs. Therapy Animals

A service animal is a dog trained to perform specific tasks to help a person with a disability. By federal law, a trained service dog is not considered a pet. They are allowed access to 'no pets allowed' public places as an accommodation for the person with the disability.

A therapy animal is usually someone's pet, who, with their handler, visit many people. Therapy animals are pets and are not allowed public access privileges like service animals.

Source: Pet Partners of Prescott brochure



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