

PRESCOTT DOG

DEDICATED TO PROMOTING THE HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND

September/October 2019

ALWAYS
FREE
TO GOOD HOME

**Pet Partners
Canines are
Patient
Listeners
Encouraging
Children to Read**



Details Inside!

**YCSO's Newest K9 Officer Joins Forces with
K9 Haddie, the Former Mountie**

View Breathtaking Fall Color in Hannagan Meadow Recreation Area

PET PARTNERS CANINES ARE PATIENT LISTENERS ENCOURAGING CHILDREN TO READ

Story by Heidi Dahms Foster. Photos by Laura Molinaro.

Good readers enjoy a world of adventures at their fingertips and the ability to learn anything throughout their lives. But it's crucial that those skills are developed at a young age. Now, a group of local Therapy Dog owners and their kid-loving canines are helping children open those doors through Pet Partners reading programs.

Pet Partners therapy dogs and their humans visit libraries and schools in Prescott and Prescott Valley encouraging children to find the joy in reading, many by reading to the patiently listening dogs.

Lana Fielding has worked with Pet Partners, a national organization, for five years. She is co-founder of Pet Partners of Prescott and currently participates with her Yellow Labrador rescue, Tama. She joined the Pet Partners group because she wanted to volunteer at Yavapai Regional Medical Center after she retired.

"Pet Partners is the (Therapy Dog) organization the hospital uses. The organization has one of the best programs and guidelines that I have found. They also give their teams 100 percent support," Fielding said.

Fielding and Tama visited this summer with Prescott's Abia Judd summer school. Tama is a hit because he loves everyone, young and old, Fielding said.

Fielding, like most Pet Partners participants, has poignant stories about how her dog has touched the lives of children.

"One little boy had a very hard time with most words. After he had his turn he came two more times to read with Tama, then a big hug for Tama when his time was up. Another child was sitting in our group and all of a sudden he started



crying. He lost his dog recently and was able to express to all of us how much he missed his dog and was glad Tama was there."

The other half of Pet Partners of Prescott's founding team is Lauren Zaffuto. Zaffuto knew another person with a poodle therapy dog, who gave her contact information for a breeder, and Standard Poodle Bailey joined the family.

Zaffuto had discovered therapy dogs 20 years ago, but had to wait to participate. "I knew I wanted to do this because I saw how dogs made a difference. I had to wait 15 years until I retired to get Bailey, and he is perfect," she said, noting that Bailey loves children, and seems to know who needs his attention and how best to engage them.

Zaffuto joined the national Pet Partners so she could volunteer at YRMC as well. "Pet Partners has high standards, testing the handler and the dog in an evaluation that increases in intensity. We must re-evaluate every two years and complete ongoing education. Advocacy is important as well. Pet Partners is involved on the state and national level, educating our representatives about the importance of the human-animal bond and the difference it can make in a person's life. For children, that's extremely important. Reading to an animal builds self-confidence and can lay a strong foundation as children grow up."

This past summer, Zaffuto assisted with the summer reading program in Prescott and volunteers with a Prescott Unified School District social worker in pre-school and K-2 special needs classes.

Prescott Valley Children's Library Director Lynette Christensen heard about Pet

Partners when member Julie Stewart contacted her about bringing the program to the PV Library. A dog lover herself with a Pointer named Shelby, Christensen knew right away that this would be a great fit for the children who visit.

"Children love interacting with animals, and this program helps them feel comfortable while improving their reading skills through practice with acceptance and no correction," she said.

Prescott Valley brought the program in for the summer, and it has been an amazing success. "The dogs are so mellow and their humans so patient with the children."

Julie Stewart participated this past summer in the Prescott Valley Library program with her Cavalier King Charles Spaniel Griffin. Stewart joined Pet Partners with Griffin because, she said, therapy dogs are a way for children to receive unconditional love and care. "Each therapy pet knows how best to help the child; it is quite precious to witness."

Stewart has first-hand knowledge of how a little extra help can make a difference for a child. "As a child I had difficulty reading, and dyslexia. My family provided tutoring help in the third grade. That changed my life, and I am very grateful. Pet Partners is a way to give back to the community."

She enjoys seeing children relax and become confident in their reading abilities as they interact with Griffin. "They feel safe, wholly accepted, and confident to be who they are," she said.

Debbie Zdanowicz said she chose to participate in Pet Partners with her Irish Setter Megan.



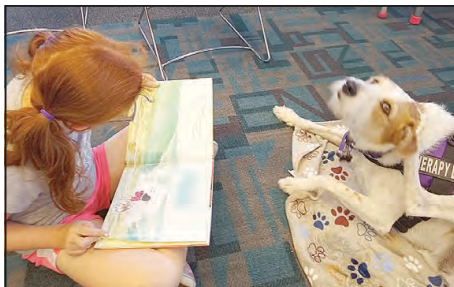
She visits reading programs at the Prescott Valley Public Library and in Prescott at Lincoln Elementary School.

"We were losing our 11-year-old Irish Setter to cancer and found an Irish Setter litter in North Carolina. The puppies' mom and dad were on the premises, and the owners home-schooled their six children. We knew the puppies would be well socialized. Megan was well worth the trip," Zdanowicz said.

She came into the Library reading program because her mother, an elementary school librarian, instilled the love of reading in all her children. "Did you know that if you are not a good reader by the end of the third grade, it affects your whole life? But it's the kids and Megan's interactions that I now enjoy," she said.

She loves that the program teaches children that reading can be fun. "It's fun to read to a dog in an environment that is non-judgmental, comfortable, and without peer pressure. The child gets reading practice that helps improve vocabulary and comprehension. If it's fun to read, the child will read more," she said.

Zdanowicz had one student in second grade read to Megan. The same student read to the dog in third grade and summer school. "I told the student if she wanted to continue reading to Megan to pick more difficult books as she is reading very well. The student followed up with a thank card saying how much she loves Megan."



Many people know former Prescott Valley Police Commander Laura Molinaro through her career, but more know her canine companion Cruiser, a "tripod" pup rescued from a New Mexico reservation. Cruiser was an injured and terrified terrier mix when he landed in the Chino Valley Animal Shelter.

Several years later, Cruiser is now a much beloved visitor to the Yavapai Regional Medical Center (East and West Campus), the Veteran's Administration Medical Center in Prescott, the Town of Prescott Valley Civic Center and Library. He is no longer afraid, and in fact, even after his rough start, overflows with love of people and especially children.

"Cruiser seemed to lead me toward Therapy Dog work – it was almost as if it was his calling, his purpose in life," Molinaro said.

This past summer, Laura and Cruiser joined the pilot Pet Partners reading program at the Prescott Valley Library. Cruiser is delighted to interact with the children, and his missing limb opens many discussions with children and adults about how we can thrive in life even with difficulties. (Read Cruiser's entire story at PrescottDog.com, the November/December 2018 issue).

"Cruiser's favorite humans are kids. He gravitates towards them whenever he sees or hears them," Molinaro said. "He is just drawn to these small humans. Perhaps he senses their innocence and wishes to connect with that feeling. Perhaps it is their size; they are a little closer to his level than adults."

"The sight of those small hands stroking his fur gets me every time. I sometimes wonder what passes through that touch and hope these kids never lose the ability to convey the love and kindness they show him. It is genuine, never forced, and I think Cruiser senses that and revels in it."

She loved participating in the PV Library program this summer and hopes to see one like it at a future time at the Dewey-Humboldt Public Library. "Not only does (the program) help children practice their reading in a safe environment, but at the same time allows them to develop compassion for another living being. Caring for, petting, brushing the dogs while they read helps that connection," she said.

Lana Fielding is looking forward to seeing the reading program expand in the area.

"We are going to be working with children of all ages this year, particularly in the Prescott area, from Discovery Gardens to high school students. How you treat an animal can transfer to how you treat people. We teach kindness, body language, needs vs. wants, differences, and more. It's so cool!" she said.

Additionally, "Being able to read and read well builds a strong foundation that will help children as they go through life. Building self confidence and developing appropriate social skills are very important to how you interact with others," she said.

Find Pet Partners of Prescott on Facebook or at: <https://petpartnersofprescott.weebly.com/>



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