



SPRING 2014

*Touching Hearts, Bringing Joy, Offering Comfort, and
Enriching Lives with Certified Therapy Dog Teams*

Welcome New Members

Kevin Figueroa and Buddy

Judy Heintz and Mister

Cindi Hines and Oli

Leslie & Matthew Horowitz and Fred

Gail McKeen and Boo

Ian McLean and Basil J

James Megrath and Banjo

Erin O'Malley and Tibby

Jennifer Opel and Pippa

Jeff Rettew and Tucker

Mary Sleeper and Cooper

Alicia Weber and Willow

Greetings From Big Dog

by Steve Reiman, TDV Founder and President

Someone asked if therapy dogs enjoy what they do. An easy response is "yes, dogs are working animals". But, I think there is far more to say in a proper answer.

A while back, part of my team included a delightful lady with a handsome Golden Retriever named Riley. I called him the "hug-a-dog" and would tell the kids in the hospital pediatric unit that they have to give Riley a hug or he couldn't get to the next kid. So, a child would hug Riley after which he'd go to the next kid and plop down on the floor making him or her drop down to hug him. Truly, the patients loved seeing friendly and loving Riley come on duty.

But Riley developed bone cancer and eventually lost a forepaw. A few months later, I called his handler and asked when she was bringing Riley back on duty. "But, he only has 3 legs!" I responded with "How about next week?"

Did Riley enjoy unleashing smiles to those he visited? His handler told me that when she drove in the following week, they were within 2 miles of the hospital when Riley realized where he was going and began to howl as if to say "Yahoo, I'm back on duty". Riley brought more smiles to the kids that day than ever before. It was as if he understood what they were going through and was really happy to be back helping them to get through it.

When I see TDV dogs on duty, they seem far more energized than usual. They get really excited about the attention people give them and you can see the difference in the way they strut their stuff in the halls.

So, yes, just as TDV members enjoy going on visits, so do their canine partners.

With my sincere respect and gratitude,



2014 NEK Veterans Summit Features Therapy Dogs of Vermont Session



By Bob Uerz, Executive Director

On Saturday, March 15th at Lyndon State College, the **2014 Northeast Kingdom Veterans Summit** was held that attracted 258 attendees and 52 veterans service organizations and exhibitors from across the region. The all-day event included an afternoon session by Therapy Dogs of Vermont featuring TDV Testers Beth Wadleigh and Raymond Belanger along with therapy dog teams of Mary Cobb & Buddy, Rebecca Hackett & Otis, and Jennifer Monteleone & Baxter.

This session, designed specifically for Veterans and their families, included information about the work of our organization and an opportunity to meet certified therapy dog teams & ask questions.

This session also provided an opportunity to share with attendees an update on **TDV's Third Decade Initiative to Serve Veterans** which includes efforts to: increase the number of TDV teams making visits at the VA Medical Center in White River Junction, establish a TDV presence at the VA Community Out-Patient Clinic in Burlington (VA CBOC in Burlington) and expand to the other four CBOCs across Vermont located in Newport, Rutland, Bennington, and Brattleboro as well as create a TDV Vet-to Vet Program in 2015.



Special thanks to Beth, Raymond, Mary & Buddy, Rebecca & Otis, and Jennifer & Baxter for making the trip to the conference and giving their Saturday to help spread the word about our work and encourage folks to join us!



Vermont State Employees Credit Union Members Choose Therapy Dogs of Vermont to receive \$10,000 Gift

By Bob Uerz, Executive Director

After months of waiting and work by TDV members and other supporters, on Tuesday evening, March 11th at the VSECU Annual Meeting, it was announced that TDV would be awarded a \$10,000 gift through their **We Care 2 Program** to expand TDV's geographic reach across Vermont and secure additional software necessary to make such an effort occur seamlessly.

Deb Helfrich and her therapy dog Cora joined me in the evening-long wait to learn if we would be one of the two organizations of the five finalists chosen from 49 making applications to receive funding. Glad to report TDV was selected by VSECU members to receive \$10,000 along with the NCSS Youth Transition Program.

Special thanks to all VSECU members who voted for us and for all TDV members who each day are out making visits to enrich the lives of people in our communities across Vermont and beyond!



The Loss of Pepper

Sadly, at the age of 15, Pepper crossed over the Rainbow Bridge at Christmas. Pepper had a remarkable life and touched many people as a TDV dog.

Pepper was 5 years old when I adopted him. His family moved from British Columbia to Quebec and decided they didn't want him any longer. Having grown up with Dalmatians and adopting a couple of my own over the years, I couldn't resist taking a look when the Frontier Animal Society (Quebec branch) called me for an "expert" opinion. Little did I know what I was about to meet. He was a very calm, very quiet dog that just wanted to be around people; especially children. He was definitely not your typical Dalmatian. The decision to adopt him was (and still is) one of the best decisions I have ever made.

Pepper became a TDV dog in 1995 and was the only Dalmatian to ever be certified with Therapy Dogs of Vermont. He was also the first Canadian dog to represent TDV. As I live right on the Vermont/Quebec border, it was easy to volunteer at facilities in the Northeast Kingdom area. Pepper became a regular visitor at Holland Elementary School as a reading buddy (one graduating class even dedicated their yearbook to him) and Bel-Aire Health Care facility. I know that Holland Elementary and Bel-Aire will miss Pepper dearly, not to mention the volunteer fire fighters in Stanstead, Quebec who recruited Pepper to be their mascot at public events such as Borderfest, fire fighters' games and parades.

One special memory that stands out from Derby Line Community Day this past August, was of a tall, very mature, high school student who got down on hands and knees and hugged Pepper for five minutes. The student was whispering in Pepper's ear, all the while holding him close. Once the he finished the one-sided conversation, the student looked up at me with tears in his eyes and asked if I remembered him. Of course I did even though it had been six years since I last saw him. Pepper certainly recognized him right away as the wagging tail was a good indicator. In a very quiet voice he told me that Pepper had helped him through a very difficult and painful part of his life. He said he "made it through" because he knew he could talk to Pepper and knew that Pepper was there for him. Before the young man left, his parting words were "Thank you for sharing Pepper with us and thank you for making a positive difference in my life". As he walked away, Pepper who never barked, gave a loud and distinct "woof" and watched him disappear into the crowd. I can't help but feel that Pepper was encouraging him to continue working towards his life's goals and to overcome future challenges

As members of Therapy Dogs of Vermont, we all have lovely heart-warming stories of the amazing work our dogs have done over the years. Helping people and bringing comfort is what our dogs do best. They provide unconditional love, compassion and are never judgmental. As members of TDV we are very proud of our four-legged partners and the joy they bring to us and to those we visit. Pepper lived for his role as a TDV dog. He was paying it forward, grateful for the second chance in life once we became a team. For those of you who saw him at TDV events or worked with him during evaluations in the NEK, you know how special he was. It is an understatement to say that he will be greatly missed by both sides of the border communities.

For the last nine years, my mantra before each visit has been "Come on Pep, let's make a difference because we're a team." It's difficult to think that I won't be saying these words any longer. However, I am comforted to know that TDV members continue to make positive differences for so many people they have contact with.

B eth Wadleigh, Tester/Evaluator for the Northeast Kingdom



Stress Relief—TDV at UVM's Davis Center, March 17th



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Karen Odato

Jason & Emily Reed

Steve Reiman

TDV TESTERS and/or EVALUATORS

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Tim Pollock

Deborah Schapiro

Brenda Carpenter

Emily Reed

Jenn Vaughan

Callie Field

Jason Reed

Beth Wadleigh

Deb Helfrich

Steve Reiman

Emily McLean

Helyn Herr

Karen Odato

Kristin Comeau

Deb Helfrich

Our testers and evaluators are also supported by dedicated certification support team: Craig Deslauriers, Nancy Kahn, John O'Connor, and Maryellen Sullivan.

TDV SUPPORT TEAM

Katie McDonald, *Social Media*

Janet Dooley, *Fanny Allen Coordinator*

Kathleen Boyce, *FAHC Orientation*

Wendy Huntley, *Liaison to Camp Ta-Kum-Ta*

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