



WINTER 2014

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

Welcome New Members

John Delphia and Prince
Mary Cobb and Buddy
Gail Dickinson and Bentley
Joan Denizot and Zyla

Brian Carten and Judson
Peggy Jarvis and Tricks
Lee Krein and Dixie
Gail Yocis and Sandy

Allie Graft and Maggie
Tom Zenaty and Milo
Susan Wilkie and Pepper
Jeanette Dickson and Miss Buffington

Greetings From Big Dog

by Steve Reiman, TDV Founder and President

To all of you who extended sympathy for the passing of our precious Micro, I say *Thank You*. He was a Therapy Dog of Vermont for nearly 14 of his 15 years. He brought countless smiles to us and to the people he visited in hospitals, retirement homes, libraries, and schools.

One day, a tear welled up in the eye of a lady who was gently stroking him while he was nestled on her lap. "I could never have another dog" she said. She then told me about the dogs she had owned and how much she had loved them. She was devastated when they passed and she told me she couldn't bear the thought of losing another.

I remember that dreadful feeling that came with the loss of Lily and later Jordan, TDV's founding dogs. After a quiet moment, I looked at her and told her that someday I would lose Micro and it would be devastating but in the meantime, he was bringing immense joy to me and to all those to whom he administered dog therapy.

When Micro passed just before Thanksgiving, as expected, it became a truly difficult time for my wife and me. There was no one to greet us when we came home. No one was asking to go for walks with the other dogs in the neighborhood. No one snuggled up to us throughout the night.

Although we had freedom to stay out later each evening and did not have to rush home to care for our dog, there was always something missing no matter how hard it was to ignore it. Less than three weeks later, my wife's daughter called with an order to "Get up here; there is a puppy you HAVE to see". And, we didn't come home without her. Her name is Kristee. She was nearly 5 pounds and 12 weeks old and she began unleashing smiles from the moment we met her.

Who knows, maybe someday she'll pass her tests, become certified, and will be unleashing smiles while on official TDV duty.

With my sincere respect and gratitude,



TDV Dogs offer Comfort to Grieving Essex High School Students

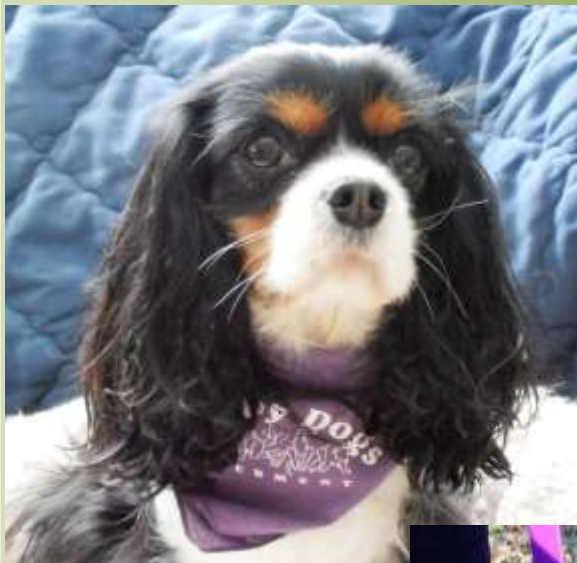
by Deb Helfrich

On a blustery, snowy morning in December, crisis counselors at Essex High School requested therapy dogs be on hand to comfort students grappling with an unimaginable tragedy—the death of student Gunnar Schumacher (14-year old Gunnar was allegedly murdered earlier that week by his father, who then committed suicide).

Three handlers and their dogs, also members of our certification team, raced to the school: Nancy Kahn and Sophie, Maryellen Sullivan and Toby, and Deb Helfrich and Cora. We received a quick briefing from the crisis team and were led to where the students were congregating.

The school gym had been transformed into a somber gathering place, where students covered the walls with memories of Gunnar and messages to a slain friend. Soon, students flocked around the therapy dogs, who sat on the floor with their handlers, quietly accepting students coming and going to interact with the dogs as needed. Sophie, Toby, and Cora seemed to sense both the need and the pain.

Cora patiently and quietly lay in the middle of a circle of students with hands settled on her for comfort, getting up to nuzzle those who were crying, and accepting hugs as students cried into her fur. Nearby, Toby was eliciting smiles from students who were gathered around, watching him do some tricks and obedience; when he wasn't showing the students his repertoire, he was patiently accepting their grief as well. Sophie, the littlest of our group (a cavalier), was seen sitting on many a lap, her warmth and gentleness a calming presence. Among the stream of students, faculty, staff and crisis counselors also visited with the dogs, expressing immense thanks and appreciation for the therapy dogs.



Sophie

We continue to keep the students and faculty of Essex High School, as well as Gunnar's family, in our thoughts and prayers.



Toby



Cora



Therapy Dogs: A Source of Comfort

Kristen Tripodi - FOX44 ABC22

12/8/13 5:36 PM

BURLINGTON, Vt.- Research shows your favorite animal can help improve your health. With that in mind volunteers with the non-profit organization Therapy Dogs of Vermont visit the hospital or nursing home with a furry friend to help relieve people's stress.

Every other week Todd suits up and goes to work. "He puts on his bandana and he gets in the car and he gets all excited about where he's going," said Katie Ziegler, Todd's owner and a member of the Therapy Dogs Vermont board. Todd is a certified therapy dog with Therapy Dogs of Vermont.

For this Shih Tzu work consists of a few hours of non-stop head rubs and attention.

"You're a good boy, a good boy," said Louise Diamond, who visited with Todd at his visit to Starr Farm Nursing Center.



Louise Diamond pats Todd with TDV member Katie Ziegler

Todd and his owner Katie Ziegler, 22, are one of more than 200 therapy dog teams who work with Therapy Dogs of Vermont. The organization helps train dogs like Todd throughout Vermont, New York, New Hampshire, and Canada.

It also arranges visits to nursing homes such as Starr Farm Nursing Center in Burlington.

"We just really enjoy having them here because we can't have dogs of our own anymore so this is the best next thing," said Diamond.

While residents enjoy his visits - for Todd this is a chance at a better life. He was a stray in Tennessee when Katie adopted him about a year ago. "He's completely blind. But he's very, very friendly and he's got a great temperament for this type of work," said Ziegler. Katie says her own hospital stay a few years ago inspired her to get involved. "I was visited by many therapy dogs during that stay. And it was just amazing to have them visit. It completely brightens your day," remembers Ziegler.

So she set out to train Todd to become a therapy dog and the two went through months of training. "Then you go on to do three evaluations in an actual facility," said Ziegler.

Once Todd was certified he was ready for official visits; giving people a chance to chat with both him and Katie.

"The best part of doing this work is seeing how much the dogs and the people enjoy it. It's not just for the people, the dogs have a great time too," said Ziegler.

[Click here to see the FOX44 ABC22 video.](#)



TDV's Lizzie's First Visit at the VA Hospital

by Gordon Perkinson

It was in August of 2011. Seven nurses sat in a disciplined row at work at their desk space behind a long counter. The medical/surgical floor at the VA Hospital in White River Junction houses about 80 veterans, mixed-gender, in semi-private and small-group room arrangements. It was our first visit.

"Would you like to meet a nice dog from "Therapy Dogs of Vermont?" I asked at the door of a near-by room. Catherine, it turns out, was not a dog-lover *per se*, but was happy to engage me in conversation about her bird that she had for 27 years. Lizzie sat patiently, playing second fiddle to feathers, and content to do so, for now.

I walked on down the hallway. Behind me, I vaguely heard someone call out, "Get Howard." I continued on to the door of a room occupied by four men. I asked my question, "Would you like a visit from a therapy dog?" No answer. I repeated the question two more times, then decided to take a chance. One of the men dropped a weary hand over the side of his bed, and began to stroke Lizzie. He talked a while with us. Shortly we proceeded to the other beds for brief visits.

Returning to the hallway, Lizzie and I nearly bumped into the tallest medical staff member I have ever seen – and a small fellow next to him in red pajamas. "Hi, Gordon," said the stately man in green. "This is Howard." Howard gave a perfunctory acknowledgement of my existence, no affect. I introduced Howard to Lizzie.

He had not noticed Lizzie at first. He looked down. "Oh!" he said, and began to stroke her. Howard became more and more animated, talking to Lizzie, and now kneeling at her side. She sat next to him, and put her head forward to receive his gentle strokes. Lizzie, pleased with the attention, then leaned gently against him, her head pressed hard to his chest. Howard laughed. And laughed.

Seven nurses sat in a disciplined row at their desk space behind a long counter. Four of them were weeping openly. "We have never seen Howard even smile," said one wiping the tears away. "After all this time, this is a first."

Both those who give and those who receive benefit from the presence of these beautiful animals.

Note: Names in this article have been changed to protect the identities of the people involved.



Some of the staff on 1 West at the VA Medical Center in White River Junction

Pets a Boon for the Human Heart, Cardiologists Say

American Heart Association cites stress-busting, dog-walking benefits of companion animals.

Robert Preidt, reporter for HealthDay of WebMD News writes that four-legged friend of yours may be more than a companion -- he also may be boosting your heart health, experts say. An official statement released Thursday by the American Heart Association says there is evidence that having a pet, particularly a dog, may lower your risk of heart disease. Cardiology specialists weren't all that surprised.

"Pets really might be man's best friend," said Barbara George, director of the Center for Cardiovascular Lifestyle Medicine at Winthrop-University Hospital in Mineola, N.Y.



Therapy Dogs of Vermont's Annual Craft Fair

The Ziegler Family would like to thank all of those who attended, volunteered at, donated towards, and participated in the Stowe High School Holliday Craft Fair to benefit Therapy Dogs of Vermont. Without you, this event would not have been possible. We were touched by the support we received, and grateful to have been able to in turn, support the wonderful work of TDV.

Over 40 vendors from across Vermont sold beautiful handmade items, and delicious food at the event. The Vermont made products included crocheted and knitted items, woodwork, jewelry and accessories, pottery, photography, children's toys, candles, holiday ornaments, maple syrup and maple candies, jams, pickled foods, and baked goods. The large variety of items and amazing artisanship was astonishing to see.

In addition to our two legged participants, we had three therapy dog teams attend the event! Many thanks to Deb and Cora, Maryellen and Toby, and to our therapy dog Todd. Having these teams at the event allowed for education about the job of a therapy dog. I also think many of the vendors were grateful to have a cuddle with the dogs on such a cold day!

In spite of the record-breaking freezing temperatures, the whole event was a great success. We hope to continue to grow this event in the coming years and look forward to seeing you there next year!

The Ziegler Family



In Loving Memory of Jackson

by Ashley Prout McAvey

On a mild, starry, early December night, our beautiful friend crossed over the Rainbow Bridge. Diagnosed with hemangiosarcoma on September 5th, Jackson was given 1-2 months to live. He defied the odds and made it three months to the day and what a glorious three months it was. Jackson was the truest friend in the world, loved extraordinarily and forever.

We thank God for having him enrich our lives beyond words...

Never Quite the Same

Thank you, my friend, for so many years of love. You were there for me every day in every imaginable way. I hear you barking and barking at the moon and coy dogs and whomever else you were talking to before you decided you were ready to come in. I still hear you digging in your dog bed or at the foot of our bed late at night in search of the perfect spot. I see you flying through your meadow and diving in the brook on a hot summer day.

The memories are too many to list. But here are a few of my favorites: when you won the puppy push-up's contest in one of the thirty obedience classes we did together, the relish with which you devoured your McDonald's hamburger every March 27th (in one bite), the night you chased the deer at Macrae Farms and I feared I lost you until a stranger said, "Is that him?" as you flew through the air in hot pursuit about a mile away on the far field (an absolute blur), the gentleness with which you made your Therapy Dogs of Vermont visits, the way you stretched in the morning and the sound you made when doing so-- pure contentment!, turning on the icy cold water in the tub every night for your last drink before bed, after a long walk on Pond Road or Shelburne Farms or Simmons, seeing you have a final burst of exuberance as you flew around your yard, and the pure joy in your body as you romped with your sister Annie and "chosen" little brother Nibbles.



It's so strange to type without you next to me, rolling on your back so I can better rub your belly with my foot. I loved how you preferred to come everywhere with us and would rather come along for the ride than stay at home with the run of the house (I still see your golden, fluffy head in my rear view mirror when I glance in the back of the car as I drive). I see you surveying every bird and every sound from your favorite spot on the front porch couch and doing the same with your left paw tucked in on the back deck. Reading to Elle at night, I feel strange not petting you with my right hand as you assume your nightly spot by her bed. Thank you for being the perfect dog. You were perfect and we love you forever. Until we meet again, there is a hole in my heart and I will never be the same.

March 27, 2005 - December 5, 2013



TDV's Connection at the VA Hospital

by Steve Reiman

Our therapy dog visits primary contact at the VA is Brooke Robinson. Brooke has been working for the VA Hospital since November of 2012 and says that she absolutely LOVES her rewarding job. Before that, she worked for Homeland Security and went to school for Art Therapy.

Brooke is a person who truly warms your heart at the first greeting. In her position at the VA Hospital, she loves to help people. She thoroughly enjoys seeing Veterans get interested in something and helps them find new interests – like with her art therapy.

Brooke absolutely loves therapy dogs coming to the VA Hospital and works with them to get through the volunteer orientation and paperwork. Brooke says “Thank you for the wonderful job TDV members do. The patients at the VA Hospital love the visits.” The VA staff is highly supportive as well as appreciative. Many want to pat and interact with therapy dogs even more than their patients do.



If TDV members are wondering if this is the right opportunity for them, they can come to the VA Hospital without their dog and meet with Brooke who will walk them through what they do and take them on a tour.

Veterans really appreciate volunteers at the VA Hospital – especially ones who come with therapy dogs. “Therapy dogs really brighten their day and they look forward to them coming. Sometimes, they are the only visitors they get”, Brooke says.

Brooke learned that Veterans at the VA Hospital would love Vet to Vet contact. Some have expressed interest in learning how to volunteer with their dogs and TDV welcomes the opportunity to test and certify them as TDV teams.

We wholeheartedly encourage all interested TDV members to contact Brooke Robinson to make visits any day of the week. Brooke can best be reached at Brooke.Robinson3@VA.gov

TDV Welcomes Two New Evaluators

We are most pleased to welcome two new evaluators to our certification team: Helyn Kerr and Emily McLean! Emily and Helyn were total stars during their training period and we're so fortunate to have them as part of our certification team! They also regularly help at tests and clinics on top of guiding our newly tested teams through the certification process.



A Therapy Dog's First Visit

by Susan Wilkie

The day came for our first therapy dog visit. After being certified in November of 2013, Pepper, our 6-year-old British black lab, would have a date with her future work of being a therapy dog. Her first "gig" or "session" was scheduled at Norwich University in December. Norwich wanted therapy dogs to "distress" their students who were taking final exams. It sounded to me a good way to begin our Therapy Dog career so I signed us up as I knew Pepper really enjoyed kids at this age.

Let me tell you a bit about Pepper. Her route to this work came from being a show dog that didn't take the first place ribbons (only second place) because she wanted her belly rubbed by the judges and licked their hands. She came from a kennel where she didn't fulfill their 5 year breeding plan for her of being a champion dog. One might say she was a failure in her breeder's eyes so they wanted to get rid of her. They told us she would be a "couch dog" which, I could tell from her breeder, was a really a low "status" for dogs. The day we met her I saw her take commands from their 3-year old. I saw the runs where she lived with the eleven other show dogs and heard that she was "allowed" to be in the house with them for one hour a week. When the time came to put her back downstairs to their kennel from their living quarters she put all fours out and refused to go down the stairs. It was at this point that I wanted to spring her and provide her a "couch" for life! And these were very caring, reputable dog breeders! So, Pepper came to Vermont and we could see, even after a few days that she had a very special quality of really looking at you and being vulnerable. She always gets what she wants, always. After a good four years of being our "couch" dog we decided to share her with others because she has a capacity to really make connections with people. Our British gal certainly likes to charm hearts!

So off we went to our first visit. It was a snowy day and the wind really whipped through Norwich's red brick buildings. I must confess I was a bit nervous as this was our first, official Therapy Dogs of Vermont visit. However, when I opened the back door to the car, Pepper sat on the seat and just looked at me, really looked at me, and my anxiety melted. After all, what could go wrong with Pepper's winning ways? So we made our way to the building and once inside, I quickly noticed that every student had eyes for Pepper. "What was a dog doing in their hallway?" After I asked a young female cadet where I needed to go she said that they were expecting me and she would bring me to the room outside the cafeteria as that would be where we'd be meeting with students. So Pepper got her first elevator ride up to the room, looking at me as if to say "This is really neat!". She was liking this!

The room had a glass wall open to the hallway by the cafeteria. It was full of cadets, about 35 I'd say, lounging on sofas, chairs, the floor or standing around. All eyes focused on Pepper when we entered.

She seemed to know that the bandana and badge meant that she was the focus of attention and, boy, did she respond. True to form, she went over to a crowd of cadets and "presented" her belly to be rubbed for starters. The cadets, in groups of three to six would gather around her and just sit on the floor and pet her. They would come in waves, pet her for around 5 -10 minutes and then another wave would come. All the time I was watching for signs from Pepper that she was tired of the attention but instead I got a look that told me she had truly risen to the ranks of being the star attraction and she loved it!

During the time we were with the cadets (we must have seen about 80 to100 that day) I was interested in their connection with dogs and what memories Pepper conjured up for them. Many talked about their dogs at home, wanting to share with their friends all about how special their Lab, Cocker, Shepherd, Rottweiler, Beagle, Poodle, mutt, etc. was to them, how much they missed their dogs and some even admitted that they missed their dogs more than their families! How they couldn't wait to get home to see their dogs and how they wanted to have a dog when they finally settled in their careers. One cadet shared about the six dogs they had at home on their ranch in the west, another about the how he felt dogs were even more therapeutic than horses and another about how he only wished he could have his dog with him at school. The cadets impressed me as being very respectful of Pepper and I and of each other.

One cadet came in with his buddies (about 6 of them) and hesitated about sitting on the floor near Pepper. He admitted to the group that he was a "cat" person and didn't really like dogs. I told him that I had some friends like him who preferred cats and how we really enjoyed cats too, hoping to make him feel included in what had become an obvious love fest over Pepper. I watched this group talk and banter about dogs and I observed how



The cat cadet slowly got to his knees then settled in beside his friends and after a fashion put his hand against Pepper's side. Then slowly his hand started to pet her and kept petting her. She raised her head and gave him that searching look and then put her head down and just laid there while the group gently massaged her body. When this group got up to leave the cat cadet admitted that he enjoyed the experience of petting Pepper and that he might have to rethink this "dog thing". "Pepper wins over more hearts", I thought.

On a break to go outside and have some water, Pepper even charmed cadets who were leaving the building. Practically every person came over and asked "Can I pet your dog?" No matter where we traveled on our route back to the meeting room, if a cadet saw us, sure enough they'd come over and ask to pet her. Even when we ended our session and were walking back to the car in the snow cadets walking by came over to Pepper and many times she would require that they rub her belly showing them that vulnerability is certainly a good thing.

When we arrived home I was sure that Pepper would be exhausted as I was certainly tired from our first visit. Pepper bounded out of the car, up the stone steps and into our living room to greet my husband and our 3-year-old lab, Sargent. "Well, she had a great day, look at her energy", my husband said. Pepper had found her calling of being a therapy dog and she seemed to know. She then took her "Lambchop" stuffed toy and presented it to Sargent so they could have a rousing game of tug before she told him of her day.



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

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