



February 2023

# PVAA PRAIRIE TAILS

Welcome to the February 2023 edition of our Prairieland Visiting Animals Association newsletter: a collection of information, stories, news, events and all other things having to do with our favorite subject - therapy animals!

## **GOING FORWARD... (Message from Chairperson Tim McHenry)**

Merriam-Webster defines a mentor as “a wise and faithful advisor or teacher.” Prairieland Visiting Animals Association could use a few of the wise and faithful to mentor our new members.

My plan is to assign a mentor to new or potential members of PVAA. Many teams begin their journey towards registration with Pet Partners or Alliance of Therapy Dogs in my prep for therapy training class. For them, mentors would be assigned a week before the class graduates.

In other cases, potential members are identified when they inquire about the next evaluation or handler’s class (specific to those registering with Pet Partners). Mentors will therefore be assigned at the point of contact.

What will mentors do? First and foremost – be a resource to the new handler. This might take the form of helping them create an account with Pet Partners and assist with registering for a handler’s course and evaluation. Navigating the Pet Partners website is not for the faint of heart.

For those interested in Alliance of Therapy Dogs, the mentor would provide contact information for the local evaluator.

Mentors can also recommend positive trainers to assist new handlers as they prepare for the evaluation with either organization.

Upon successful completion of the evaluation, mentors would then schedule the new handler to shadow them on a visit. That way, they can see the human animal bond first-hand. They can also begin assisting in finding a suitable placement for the handler and their teammate. Familiarity with placement options would be mandatory. Finally, the mentor would then shadow the new team on their first visit and possibly the second if the handler desires.

If you and your partner are currently visiting, you meet all the requirements for a mentor. You need not have two hundred hours of experience. Just a desire to befriend a new handler and ease the team's transition into this wonderful thing we do called pet therapy.

Recruitment of new teams will be a priority in 2023. The demand for therapy teams exceeds the current supply. Please consider being a mentor!

Contact me via my email address if you're interested – [timthetrainer@yahoo.com](mailto:timthetrainer@yahoo.com).

What did the man name his two watch dogs? Rolex and Timex

### WARM UP TO READING (by Debby Martin, Reading with Prairieland Dogs Coordinator)

Reading With Prairieland Dogs is happening now. Running from February 5 through March 12, we have dogs at the library to read with kids on Sundays from 2:00-3:00.

**Problem #1:** There are a lot of children hanging out in the library who do not come over to read with the dogs. Most do not even know the dogs are there.

**Solution #1:** We have added a Solicitor to the schedule. The solicitor, with their dog, will wander the Children's section of the library. They will introduce their dog, maybe let the dog do a little trick, and invite the child and parent to come read with some amazing dogs.

**Problem #2:** During the last session, I had convinced a young man to come read. At the end of his session, he asked for a book to take home. As a retired reading teacher, I was heartbroken to tell him we did not have available books to give out.

**Solution #2:** PVAA people have stepped up and donated more than 70 books. Roundtable

Bookstore, located in the NOTO Arts and Entertainment District, will supplement the books this session, making sure we have a variety of readability in the books that kids can enjoy at home. Roundtable has committed to helping in the future and we are happy knowing kids will always have books to take home in the future.

**Problem #3: Publicity.** There are a lot of people who are unaware of the program, even patrons in the library.

**Solution #3:** Post the poster on your Facebook page. Tell your friends with children. Feel free to make a copy of the poster and post it at your church. My church daycare will post one.

Learning to read can be stressful for some children. Therapy dogs can take the stress out of reading. When children smile when they read, they are more likely to read again. And we know our dogs inspire smiles!

**When you cross a frog with a dog, what do you get? A croaker spaniel**

### **MEMBER SPOTLIGHT – Rhonda Teaford and Gabriel**

*Each newsletter will feature a dedicated Prairieland Team. It is not our intent to place any one team's accomplishments over that of another. The goal here is to provide a back story on how the team came together and some highlights from their career.*



I have always had dogs for as long as I can remember, I helped kids in 4H and trained a search and rescue dog many years ago. I've been thinking about visiting hospitals and nursing homes for a long time.

In 2019, I had breast cancer. During one of my treatments at the Cancer Center, there was a therapy dog named Reagan. Karen Simecka brought him in while I was giving blood. It sure did help. I talked to Karen about the process of becoming registered if I found the right dog.

So, in 2020 I decided to get a poodle (always wanted one.) Research showed they were very loving dogs.

That's where Gabriel came into the picture. He was 8 weeks when I got him. My grandson was three at the time and my mother-in-law was 90. They played a big part in Gabe's training.

He was amazing with both, no matter what they did. When we were evaluated by Pet Partners, we passed with flying colors, I was so proud of him. We started visiting when he was just over a year old.

Of course, we visit the Cancer Center. We also visit pediatrics and nursing homes.

On one visit to pediatrics there was a 10-year-old girl who was recovering from surgery. The nurse came in and asked if she would get up and walk. She said she really didn't want to. So, I said Gabriel loves to go for walks and would she help me take him for a short walk. Her eyes got a little bigger. With a smile on her face, she said... "Yes!"

I had a lanyard, so I hooked him up so we both had leashes and off we went. I just loved that! That is what pet therapy was all about.

We have a puppy limousine because I have lymphedema in my arms from the cancer. Even though he weighs only ten pounds, he gets heavy after a while. The stroller makes him the perfect height for petting as well.



My cousin and I were getting a treatment at the same time one day and I was telling him that I wanted to do pet therapy. I was trying to think of a team name for Gabriel and me. Without hesitation he said "K9 Blessings."

It has become our team's name. Since joining, Gabe and I have met a lot of very special people -- both therapy teams and the people we've visited.

## Welcome to the Family!

Congrats to our newest Alliance of Therapy Dog teams!



Kelsey & Apollo



Mary Ann & Emma

## **CHEYENNE'S WAGGIN' TALES**

*This column is dedicated to therapy dogs past and present that have enriched the lives of countless souls throughout the history of Prairieland Visiting Animals Association. May this perspective provide you with unique insights into the power of animal assisted interventions.*



**I am a good dog. This much I know. If I were to ever doubt this, I am reminded by the throngs of patients and medical heroes at Stormont Vail. There is no greater thing than to know you are loved.**

**Just before Christmas, Tim and I met a 73-year-old woman in her hospital room. I knew we had something in common. She was a greeter at a local sporting goods store. I am a therapy dog. We have similar jobs except that she probably doesn't wear a vest like mine.**

**She told us that a man entered the store, grabbed a pool cue, and beat her with it. He broke her jaw, her collarbone, lacerated her ear and left her with a concussion so severe that she can no longer hear out of her tattered ear. Humans are one of the few species that preys upon itself.**

**She moved here a year ago to be with family. Her t-shirt bore the picture of her much adored 200-pound Great Dane. Her recovery will take weeks. She misses her dog. So, a call was put in for a therapy dog team. Maybe I could be her dog for a few minutes.**

**There is good in this world and there is pure evil. Good lies broken and battered in a hospital room. Evil is charged with 4 felonies and is locked up. After all she's been through, Good says she loves Topeka.**



**I am a good dog. And today, a good dog made her smile. This much I know.**

### **National Therapy Animal Organizations**

- **Pet Partners, <https://petpartners.org/>**
- **Alliance of Therapy Dogs <https://www.therapydogs.com/>**

## **TIPS FROM TIM THE TRAINER**

**They're not robots.**

**At some point, it's something I say to every class when I sense the frustration welling up inside the human at the other end of the leash. "I need to be able to control this dog!"**

**"Control" of a dog, or any sentient species, is an illusion. In my line of work, this notion has been fueled by aversive style trainers who spout that compliance can be achieved by frightening or intimidating a dog.**

**Can we effectively manage behavior? Yes. Can we expect the behavior of our therapy partners to be predictable? Sure, with ongoing training and socialization. Can we control our dogs as though they were a computer to be programmed to our specifications? Good luck with that.**

**So how can you support your dog when their response to a stimulus is, shall we say, unpredictable? I'm referring to those moments when you say to yourself or to anyone within earshot, "I've never seen THAT before."**

**Recently Cheyenne and I were invited to a ribbon cutting ceremony at the Geary County Hospital in Junction City. Stormont Vail Hospital had purchased the facility and had gathered dignitaries to christen the changing of the guard. Our assignment was simple – mingle with the guests in a packed lobby to raise awareness of the human/animal bond within the hospital environment.**

**The ceremony began and Cheyenne laid on the floor beside me as Stormont CEO Dr. Robert Kenagy gave a short talk. Just as he grabbed the oversized scissors to cut the ribbon, a nurse standing in front of us stepped back to get a better view. In doing so, she planted her foot squarely on Cheyenne's rib cage.**

**The raspy "WOOOOOF" startled nearly everyone in the lobby and all eyes turned to us, including those of the hospital CEO, who deftly offered some humorous commentary before cutting the ribbon.**

**By now I was walking a frightened and flustered Cheyenne down a hallway, followed closely by an apologetic nurse who was determined to make amends with Cheyenne. She was wonderful. I knelt beside my dog and gently massaged her ears and neck. Her dilated eyes softened, and her composure soon returned. I handed the nurse some treats and Cheyenne gleefully took them gently from her hand.**

**Order was restored and we returned to the ceremony, all the while watching for any other signs of stress. We greeted the multitudes, Cheyenne performed a few tricks, and we**

headed home. As we hit the highway, I caught myself saying, “never seen THAT before.”

What worked for me works for most dogs. First, be proactive. Always be on the lookout for signs of stress in your partner – and in you, for that matter. Your energy travels down the leash and right into your dog.

Secondly, if your dog behaves in an unusual manner, move them away from the source of their uneasiness calmly but immediately. By now you have all heard that you are your dog’s best advocate. So be that person. Comfort and support your dog. If they regain their composure, ease them back into the visit. If not, call it a day.

Cheyenne and I have logged seven hundred hours of therapy time together. But I had no idea how she would react to being stepped on in a large crowd. Maybe I should have seen it coming but I didn’t. I simply had to move her away, support her, assess my emotional state, and decide if we could continue the visit.

After all, I’m not a robot either.

**My email password has been hacked.  
That’s the third time I’ve had to rename the dog...**

### **PetSmart Therapy Dog Class**

The next therapy class at PetSmart will begin on Sunday, February 26, at noon. Therapy classes meet for 6 weeks, and each session lasts an hour. The class is almost full. Another therapy class begins May 10<sup>th</sup>.

Canine Good Citizenship certification is recommended but not required. Please pass this onto friends and family but tactfully mention that this is not a course for dogs and handlers who have not had some basic level of positive training. The cost is \$169.

Register and pay for the class in store or on-line at [petsmart.com](http://petsmart.com). Therapy classes typically fill up so early registration is encouraged.

Contact Tim McHenry ([timthetrainer@yahoo.com](mailto:timthetrainer@yahoo.com)) for more information.

### **Training classes are also offered at:**

Camo Cross Dog Training - 3526 SE 21st St, Topeka, KS 66607  
<https://www.camocrossdogtraining.com/group-classes.html>

Helping Hands Humane Society -5720 SW 21st St, Topeka, KS 66604  
<https://www.hhhstopeka.org/training-classes/>

## Just a Reminder...

Our next meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 7, from 6:30-7:30pm in Rm 206 at the Topeka Shawnee County Public Library. You don't have to be a member to attend, join us and find out what we're all about.

Stormont Vail Health reimburses all expenses related to preparing your animal for therapy work through Pet Partners. Special thanks to Stormont Vail Auxiliary, who set up this fund in recognition of former Volunteer Director Beverly Rice.

Pet Partners ([petpartners.org](http://petpartners.org)) offers online classes to help strengthen the bond between you and your dog. Click on the link below for more information. Alliance of Therapy Dogs ([therapydogs.com](http://therapydogs.com)) features online articles that might prove helpful as well.

<https://petpartners.org/volunteer/volunteer-center/resource-library/>

The next Pet Partners Evaluation for new or current teams will take place on Saturday, Feb. 18 at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 3625 SW Wanamaker. This class is full and has a waitlist – please contact Sharon Fricke at [slintonf@gmail.com](mailto:slintonf@gmail.com) for assistance. The next evaluation is scheduled for April 15, 2023.

Julie Hoffman ([julieprairielandpp@gmail.com](mailto:julieprairielandpp@gmail.com)) teaches the Handler's Course required for all Pet Partners registrations. The next class date and time will be announced soon. The Handlers Course is held at the Topeka/Shawnee County Public Library. Visit the PVAA website to register when the time comes. Our good friends at MO-KAN Pet Partners in Kansas City also conduct Handler's Classes and evaluations. Go to [mo-kanpetpartners.org/events](http://mo-kanpetpartners.org/events) for more information.

ALLIANCE OF THERAPY DOGS evaluations can be scheduled with Karen Simecka. For more information contact her at [ksimecka1@gmail.com](mailto:ksimecka1@gmail.com).

## A Little Bit About Us

Prairieland is a friendly group of folks from the heartland who are interested in promoting the human/animal bond. Our group provides human/animal visitation teams to healthcare facilities, schools, and other facilities that can benefit from interactions with animals. We conduct educational seminars and workshops and promote a mentoring program for newly registered teams. The Association meets about six times a year, and two or more times annually, it conducts Pet Partners evaluation events for prospective human/animal visitation teams.

### Officers:

Chair: Tim McHenry

Vice-Chair: Judy Knoll

Secretary: Maisy Struve

Treasurer: Julie Hoffman

### Contact us:

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