



December 2022

PVAA PRAIRIE TAILS

Welcome to the December 2022 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!

MESSAGE FROM OUTGOING CHAIRPERSON KAREN SIMECKA

It has been my pleasure to serve you as Chairperson these last four years. I was surprised at our last meeting to be awarded a "Certificate of Appreciation" for my service and commitment to PVAA by Sharon Fricke. A gift bag was handed to me and inside I found a beautiful and gorgeous bronze figure of 2 Irish Setters with a red 'Reagan' dog tag around their necks (and in memory of Bailey & Emmy on the back). It was a moment in time that I will not ever forget. Such thoughtfulness and kindness warms my heart. It brings tears to my eyes when I think of all of you. Thank you so much for making my last days a special time. I'm humbly grateful for all the support you've given me over the years.

Our new bylaws were adopted after much discussion at our annual meeting and will be posted soon on our website Member's Only page. We have built a solid foundation and framework for PVAA in the future years. I'm looking forward to new leadership next year. Please support our new officers, Tim, Judy, Maisy & Julie, plus our new members-at-large, Sharon & Jill. Thanks to Debby for taking over the Reading Program at the library. Volunteer your time when you can. It's so much fun to do things together and our dogs love it too.

There has been a huge interest in pet therapy lately, primarily because of our Facebook &

Instagram posts by Diana. We have adopted her Social Media Policy and Guidelines for Members. They will be posted on the website as well. Please continue to like us, share posts and send pictures of visits with your animal to Diana Zimmerman (dianazim16@gmail.com).

Don't forget to send Judy Knoll(jemknoll@gmail.com) a note about where you're visiting, day, time and how often. Judy is also overseeing scheduling of Juvie (Juvenile Detention Center) and Court dogs. Let her know if you're interested in joining the teams.

Please support us on Dillons and Amazon Smile websites. If you haven't signed up, go to our website, and follow the instructions on adding Prairieland as the charity that you support.

Finally, I want to thank my officers, Tim, Judy & Diana for all their hard work and support this past year and some for more than a year, if I remember correctly, It has been a pleasure working with all of you and I hope to stay involved in PVAA for many years to come, God willing. In addition, I would like to personally thank everyone that worked these past few months on a variety of projects that were near and dear to my heart. You guys' rock!

Love to all, Karen - Retiring Chairperson

**What do you get when you cross a cocker spaniel, a poodle, and a rooster?
A cockerpoodledo!**

Fall Into Reading (by Debby Martin, Reading with Prairieland Dogs Coordinator)

We had a successful READ with Prairieland Dogs at the library this fall. The last Sunday we had 33 reading sessions with children. I don't know if it was a record, but it was the most I had witnessed. We had three dogs present every week.



Big thank you to Tim McHenry, Pamela Grant, Carolyn Buono, Bobbi Shinn, Maisy Struve, Erin Corbin, Lee Boyd, Jill Stewart, Lisa Horn, Lindsay Kufahl, and Karen Simecka who brought their dogs, or order to the chaos by monitoring.

Our next session starts in February, we would love to have you join us. We would like to have books available to give to the kids at the next session. You can bring a book to the December 3rd party, or drop it by Cruise Holidays in Brookwood Shopping Center. We are looking for picture books for primary kids, or cardboard books for the littles.

I was at the Cancer Center with Dinah a couple of weeks ago. We found a middle-school aged boy waiting for a shot. He looked at us and said, "I know you from the library. I read with some dogs." He was not looking forward to his shot and told me he always cries. I told him to not look at the needle, but just look at the Dinah card and it wouldn't hurt nearly as much. We saw him later and he said, "I didn't cry. I didn't even yell. I'll see you Sunday at the library." I had to tell him we wouldn't be back until February. But when we are back, I know we will see him.

DECK THE HALLS AT THE PVAA CHRISTMAS PARTY

The annual PVAA Christmas Party will begin at 5:30 pm, Saturday, Dec. 3 at the home of Sharon Fricke. Please plan to bring a covered dish. A reminder, new board officers will be meeting prior to the party at 4 pm. Invitations will be sent out soon with additional details.

TIME TO PAY YOR DUES!

The deadline for submitting PVAA membership dues is January 1, 2023. Save yourself a stamp and pay them at the Christmas Party on December 3.

This year, supporters can choose from two levels of membership in PVAA. FULL membership is \$30 and is for those actively visiting with their animal. ASSOCIATE membership is \$20 and is best suited for members that want to belong but may not want to be active or are under the age of 16.

What could be worse than raining cats and dogs? Hailing taxis

NEW SLATE OF OFFICERS APPROVED BY THE PVAA MEMBERSHIP

New board officers were approved by the membership at the Nov. 1 Annual Meeting. They will assume their new roles after the first of the year.

Chairperson: Tim McHenry (Cheyenne and Chance)
Vice Chair: Judy Knoll (Charley)
Secretary: Maisy Struve (Nala)
Treasurer: Julie Hoffman
Member At-Large: Sharon Fricke (Azul)
Member At-Large: Jill Stewart (Ellie)

Member Spotlight – Lee Boyd and Later

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.



My Pet Partner, Later, is a Canaan Dog. Canaan Dogs are the only breed native to Israel. The breed is the Middle Eastern equivalent of Australian dingoes. Although all are descended from once-domesticated dogs, today many of them are feral, or loosely owned by the Bedouin who use them as camp watch dogs. A fun fact about Later is that his maternal grandmother was born in a Bedouin camp and her daughter, Later's mother, was then imported to the USA from Israel. I like Canaan Dogs because they are a natural (primitive) breed, come in a variety of colors, are healthy and long-lived, and very intelligent. My first Canaan Dog (Keely), Later's father (Flynn), and now Later, have all become Pet Partners.

Later got his name because he was the first puppy in his litter to climb out of the whelping box. He was completely unconcerned about leaving the other 5 pups behind. It was as if he was saying "See ya later!" as off he went to explore. He became my pick of the litter. I liked his confident and laid-back personality. Later has turned out to be very versatile. He earned his breed championship, meaning he competed in the "look pretty" competitions that you see on television in which the dogs are judged on how well they match the standard for the breed's temperament and appearance.

Later has also earned a Rally Novice obedience title, a Trick Dog title, and a Beginner Novice obedience title. But the thing that I am most proud of is his therapy work. I had observed Later seeking to greet people on walks and at dog shows and I thought he might be able to pass the evaluation and become a Pet Partner. He passed with flying colors in 2017 just after he turned 4 years old, and he has recertified two more times.

I started alternating Later with Waverly, my mixed breed Pet Partner, in the R.E.A.D. program at the Topeka/Shawnee County Public Library. His laid-back nature stands him in good stead as he patiently listens to the readers while enjoying a bit of a snooze. Now that Waverly is retired, Later is my sole R.E.A.D. dog. I'm amused by the fact that several of the children say Later looks like a wolf – and they aren't wrong - but none of them seem to be afraid of him.

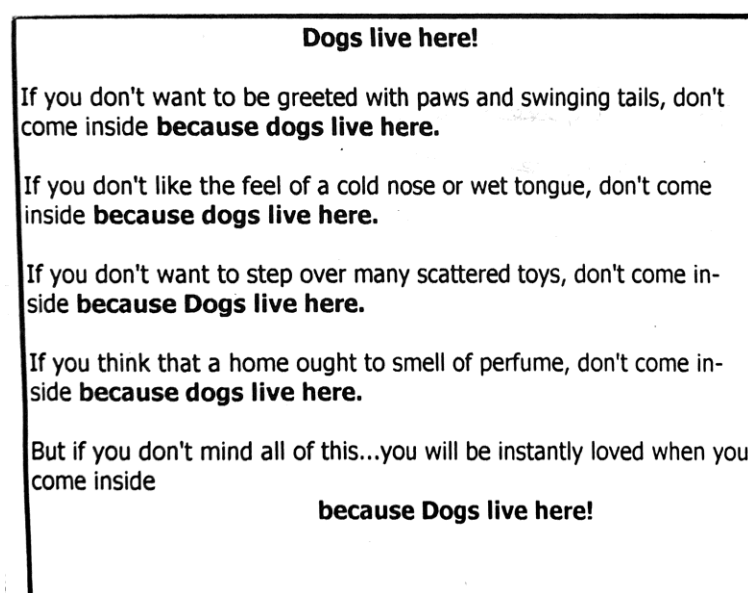
Prior to the pandemic, our other therapy gig was to spend Monday afternoon outside Family Court at the Shawnee County Courthouse. This court handles custody hearings, foster care, and adoptions, which are stressful for the children and parents alike. And stressful for the staff too, judging by how many of them need a break with the therapy dog. I knew this was going to be a good venue for us when on the very first day, as we were preparing to leave, I picked up his water bowl, and with Later in tow, headed for the bathroom to dump out the water. Later insisted on stopping to meet everyone waiting on benches on one side of the hall on our way past. I was so worried that I was going to spill his water on someone! On the way back, Later stopped to greet everyone on the other side of the hall, making everyone laugh, but at least I no longer had the water to worry about!

Later's coloration makes him a "Tuxedo Dog", so he often wore a red bow tie to court, which everyone chuckled over, not least of all the judge who occasionally wore one also. We gave restless children something to do during their wait. Sometimes I would double leash Later and let the child take him for a walk with one leash while I held the other. I also have fond memories of Later napping on the cool linoleum floor while up to 3 children sat around him brushing his thick coat.

Later has several attributes that make him a good therapy dog. In addition to being chill, he is gentle. He also has a knack for making the person that he's visiting feel special. It's very different from my retired therapy dog, Waverly, who is an indiscriminate visitor of people. I don't quite know how he does it, but Later gives you the sense that he has chosen you.

And finally, of course when we leave, everyone gets to shout "See ya Later!."

Later is now 9, but many Canaan Dogs live to be 14 or more, so I hope we have several good years of visiting ahead of us yet.



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.



Editor's note: Many of you know that my mother passed away in September at the ripe old age of 91. For the past several years, Cheyenne would spend her days with mom while I was at work. No sense in both being alone, I thought. Over the years, she shared her home with four dachshunds and inspired my love for all things dogs.

Here and There

**Tim called it "the house"
Grandma lived there for a time
No one really stays long
Years we spent together
While Tim worked
Before she got sick
Too weak to stand
Too strong to let go
My vigil is steadfast
In a chair by her bed
She is here but not here
There but not there
I can see angels in the room
What remains of her here
Will soon be there
At the foot of the Bridge
Take care of my boy
She whispers
You know that I will
It's what dogs do**

National Therapy Animal Organizations

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

Tips from Tim the Trainer (Yes, I love alliteration, don't you?)

A friend once asked of my favorite holiday. Without hesitation, I replied "December 26."

If my response seems a bit jaded, just look into the eyes of a retail drone like me. Note the dark circles under our eyes, the forced smile, and distant, "deer in the headlights" gaze that suggests that we'd rather be home lancing a boil than hear one more rendition of "Frosty the Snowman on the in-store radio.

Go ahead, ask your dog the same question posed to me. If they spoke our language, I'm guessing they would join the ranks of the holiday cynics. After all, is this not the season where every major dog publication or blog produces the "how to help your dog survive the holidays" article?

We know that dogs are creatures of habit. Frankly, I think there's an obsessive-compulsive gene (science would disagree) that is activated when you're an hour late feeding your dog and he promptly drops an empty bowl at your feet as a not-so-subtle reminder that dinner is always at 6 pm.

Extended family descending on our homes, exhausting shopping sprees, additions to the worship calendar and community events innocently serve to remove us from our routines and rituals. And none of this makes sense to our dogs. All they know is that the morning walk was postponed or cancelled all together and now there is a lighted tree growing in the living room. What strange creatures we are!

I'm not going to talk about preparing your dog for the holidays. As I alluded to earlier, you can read that stuff anywhere. What I want to address here are a few common but often overlooked signs of stress that dogs exhibit so that you can adjust on the fly. Therapy teams are in high demand this time of the year. It's up to you to manage holiday stress so that both of you are at your best for the people you serve.

Some of the stress indicators in dogs occur "out of context." Yawning but not tired. Scratching when there is no itch, panting when it's not warm. Yes, sometimes a yawn is just a yawn and isn't suggesting that you run out to the local pet retailer and buy a Thundershirt. But when these behaviors occur in clusters and are incompatible with the surroundings, your dog is exhibiting stress and it's time for you to intervene.

Reassure. Your touch provides a sense of calm and reconnects you to your dog. Sometimes that's all it takes. Consider removing your dog from the area and allow them time to decompress. Sometimes we all just need to step away and regroup. Your dog is no different.

Here are some other signs of stress you might want to look for as family and friends descend on your household: Dilating pupils, drooling, lip licking, stretching, shaking off as though

they were wet and just had a bath, flattened ears, creeping along the ground, stops eating, excessive shedding, pacing, cowering, tucking the tail, trembling, repeated blinking.

Once again, isolated displays of these behaviors may not mean anything. When they are clustered, your dog is stressed, and you need to act on their behalf. Remember, you are your dog's best advocate. They need you now more than ever.

When the dog sat on sandpaper, what did he say? Ruff! Ruff!!

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN...

Each newsletter will pay tribute to a dog that brought joy and comfort to hundreds if not thousands of people before crossing the Rainbow Bridge. Here is their story...

In Honor of Batya Partner: Kathy Schlotterbeck



Right out of the gate, Kathy Schlotterbeck knew this puppy was going to be a challenge.

Her new Golden Retriever Batya had cried all the way from the breeder's home in Boulder, CO to the motel. To calm her, Kathy spent the night on the floor with one hand in the crate. But despite struggling to find emotional balance in her life, Batya loved to train with Kathy. And she loved her playmates at Dog Day Afternoon.

And she loved pet therapy. Batya and Kathy were a registered therapy team between 2011 and 2017. Together, they visited the Stormont Senior Diagnostic Clinic and were reading companions to children attending Indian Hills Elementary as well as at the Public Library.

Batya succumbed to cancer this past June, just two weeks short of her 14th birthday. In the Hebrew language, Batya means "daughter of God." And now, she is reunited with her Father. Truly a reunion to be celebrated.

Welcome to the Family!

Congrats to our newest Pet Partner Teams!



Jill & Ellie



Kathy & Otis



Kay & Rosie



Rachel & Penny



Tim & Chance



Maisy & Nala



Lana & Opal



Ann & Sophie



Teri & Gus



Michelle & Julian



Tina & Gracie

Congrats to our newest Alliance of Therapy Dogs team!



Kelsey & Apollo

GOING FORWARD...

A few weeks ago, the membership graciously voted me in as the new Chairperson of Prairieland Visiting Animals Association. I ran uncontested and therefore saved a lot of money on campaign signs, annoying ads, and catch slogans. Thank you for the honor and privilege of serving. Tim McHenry, 2023 Chairperson.

I wear corrective lenses. So do many of you. Without them, my vision is about 20/800. In prehistoric days, I am an appetizer for a T-Rex. But when it comes to PVAA, my vision is mostly 20/20.

We are at a crossroads. For years, PVAA has been referred to as a social group. Thanks to Karen Simecka's leadership, we are a registered not for profit and have by-laws that speak to the termination of memberships should anyone choose to not follow the rules of good conduct. In my mind, the only way to be thrown out of a social group is to leave your fingers in the punchbowl too long.

I believe PVAA can and should be so much more than a social group. In short, we are

evolving. We have had more teams successfully complete Pet Partners evaluations than at any time in our history. The “Paw Squad” at Stormont has grown from three teams to 12. The reading program hosted 33 readers on the last Sunday of the fall session. As Karen indicated in her farewell message, community organizations are requesting therapy teams at a record pace.

At the same time, it’s been reported that we have 60 PVAA members although apparently only 24 are actively visiting with their partner. Associate memberships have been created for those who are no longer visiting but wish to support the organization. It’s my belief that full members need to be visiting at least once a month.

All this begs the question – who are we? In my vision, PVAA recruits, promotes training, evaluates, supports therapy teams, and promotes the human/animal bond.

Let’s start with recruiting. Demand for therapy teams exceeds the currently supply. We must be vigilant in our efforts to bring new teams into the fold. This would include but not be limited to an aggressive recruitment campaign that targets traditional and social media. How many times have you been on a visit with your dog, and someone says, “I’ve always wanted to do that with my pet?”

Training. While PVAA doesn’t sponsor training that prepares teams for this vital work, we know it’s out there and we must be advocates for it.

PVAA is blessed to have a team of dedicated and gifted evaluators affiliated with Pet Partners. In the past, evaluations and Handlers Courses were scheduled on an “as needed” basis. I would like to see both scheduled on a quarterly basis throughout the year and published on the website and Facebook page.

Support. I am working on a proposal that would provide new teams a more comprehensive mentoring program that kicks in the moment they pay their membership dues at the table following their evaluation. Mentors would help new teams find a place to visit and assist with the initial connection and occasionally follow up with their charges for a few months after their visits begin.

Support would also take the form of continuing education in the spirit of the T-Touch Seminar provided to the community in September.

Promoting the human/animal bond. We have an opportunity to be a dynamic resource to this community. But does anyone really know who we are. I will be challenging the board to produce a marketing plan that will put PVAA on the radar. Topeka has several non-profit institutions. The Rescue Mission, YMCA, YWCA, Big Brothers/Big Sisters just to name a few. How do we get there?

And now that you’ve seen my vision, what say you? Contact me at 913-544-5336 or at timthetrainer@yahoo.com.

Just a Reminder...

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) 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) 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 after the first of the year at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 3625 SW Wanamaker. A specific date and time will be announced soon. Register at www.petpartners.com. Navigating the Pet Partners website can be tricky. Contact Sharon Fricke at slintonf@gmail.com for assistance.

Julie Hoffman (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 for more information.

ALLIANCE OF THERAPY DOGS evaluations can be scheduled with Karen Simecka. For more information contact her at ksimecka1@gmail.com.

PetSmart Therapy Dog Class

The next therapy dog class at PetSmart starts February 26, 2023 and meets for 6 weeks with each session lasting one hour. Canine Good Citizenship certification is recommended but not required. Please pass this onto friends and family but tactfully mention that this is a course for dogs and handlers who have some basic level of positive training. Register and pay for the class in store or on-line at petsmart.com. Therapy classes typically fill up, so early registration is encouraged. The cost is \$169. Contact Tim McHenry (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/>

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: Karen Simecka

Vice-Chair: Tim McHenry

Secretary: Judy Knoll

Treasurer: Diana Zimmerman

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