

Furry Friends Program Visits Santa Clara's Pacific Gardens



Jeanie Battle with Furry Friend Rain

Photo by Chris Kinney

By Santa Clara Weekly Staff

Furry Friends, a local non-profit organization, visited Pacific Gardens Assisted Living Community this past weekend.

Furry Friends have been performing visits for over 20 years, visiting Pacific Gardens Assisted Living and Memory Support Community for several months.

The founders of Furry Friends explain that for people who are in difficult life situations, pets can be of special benefit. Petting a dog, for instance, has shown to lower blood pressure. Animals can also often reach people when human relationships may be difficult. Scientific research has proven that interaction with animals can significantly improve a person's physical and emotional health.

Pets can be particularly helpful to people experiencing memory challenges. "Many of our residents who have Alzheimer's had a dog

at some point in their lives," says Don Wendell, Director of Memory Support Activities for Pacific Gardens. "A pet may help bring back a warm memory from their childhood that can put a big smile on their face," adds Wendell.

Pet Assisted Therapy Services began in 1983 when Judy Kell noticed that one of a few things that lifted her daughter's spirits was interacting with her cat. Kell's nine-year-old daughter developed a rare and aggressive form of cancer that eventually took her life.

Kell, a veterinary technician, consulted with Dr. John Quick, a veterinarian in Morgan Hill, and, together with pediatrician Dr. Cecil Agee, they approached Lucille Packard Children's Hospital with the idea of bringing animals to the hospital for the children. PATS is based on the principals of 'pet facilitated therapy,' a recognized and researched therapeutic technique.

PATS provides over 200 visits a year.

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