

# The Hinsdalean

## Pet therapy programs benefit all involved

*Volunteer owners and their pets bring more than joy to children and elderly*

By Pamela Lannom

plannom@thehinsdalean.com

Counting isn't easy for 10-year-old Rachel Smith.

But she's willing to give it a try if she can practice while brushing Glory, the golden retriever she works with once a week at the Adventist Paulson Pediatric Rehabilitation Center in Hinsdale.

"It's exciting for her, so it makes it seem like she's not getting therapy when she really is," said her mom, Raena.

Rachel was born with a rare chromosome disorder called Potocki-Lupski Syndrome that can cause delayed development of motor and verbal skills, low muscle tone and behavioral characteristics similar to those with autism-spectrum disorders.

Rachel's occupational therapist, Kathy Serikaku, said she immediately recognized the inherent power of Hinsdale Humane Society's Canine Assisted Rehabilitation when she learned about it.

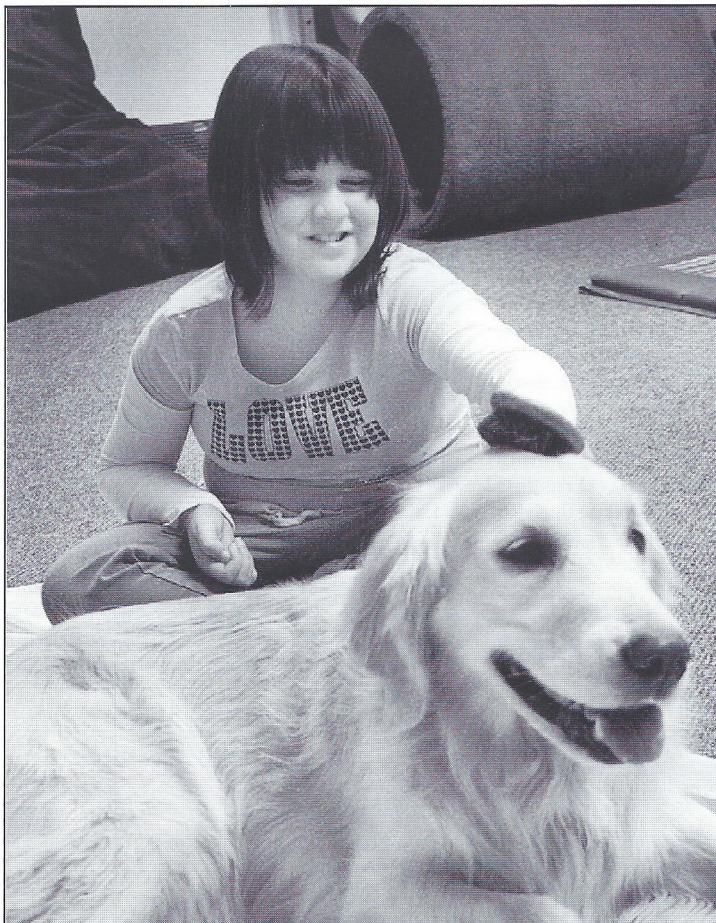
"I knew it was going to work well because it's another therapy tool," she said. "It's an easier way to achieve the goals that I would like."

Glory inspires Rachel to move out of her comfort zone, including overcoming a dislike of being touched.

"For her to give a treat to the dog and have the dog lick her hand to get it is a lot of input," Serikaku said. "She will tolerate that so I can work on that goal. In the beginning, she wouldn't do that."

No matter what Rachel is doing with Glory, from filling her water bottle to putting on her collar to taking her picture, she acquires or reinforces a skill. Glory is a strong source of motivation with activities Rachel is less than enthusiastic about, Serikaku said, citing a drill in which Rachel lies on a board and pushes herself down the hall to develop arm strength.

**■ MAKING A DIFFERENCE**  
*Making a Difference is a partnership between The Hinsdalean and the Hinsdale Humane Society, which is dedicated to the care and adoption of homeless animals and advocacy for the compassionate treatment of animals.*



**Every interaction** Rachel Smith has with therapy dog Glory has a purpose. Brushing Glory gives Rachel an opportunity to work on arm strength and practice counting. Glory also helps motivate Rachel. "Who can resist a cute dog? They are warm, they are fuzzy, they are happy," her therapist, Kathy Serikaku, said. (Jim Slonoff photos)

"If I stick the dog at the end of the hall, she'll go down and say hi to the dog. If I don't have the dog, I'm persuading her the whole way," she said.

Raena initially was not sure about Serikaku's recommendation to work with animals. But the two years Rachel has been in dog assisted therapy have made a huge difference.

"Working with the dogs have definitely helped her with being able to follow directions and seeing that cause and effect," Raena said. "That really has helped her a lot."

Rachel has overcome her fear of animals as well.

"I'm very pleased to see her love of animals," said Raena,

who adopted a kitten at the end of September. "She is just crazy about the cat and I don't think that would have happened."

Working with Glory also has enabled Rachel to learn to talk without using a communication device. That has impressed Karen Wierdak, Glory's owner, who attends all the therapy sessions.

"Now she's trying language," Wierdak said. "She babbles through most of the program and it's just amazing."

"She's just such a sweet little girl and it's so difficult to see the problems she has but so wonderful to see she can do things and learn things."

Wierdak and Glory are only

### Pet therapy programs

The Hinsdale Humane Society has been involved in pet therapy for more than three decades and currently has about 50 volunteers in its three programs.

Pets and their owners must be trained to participate in any of the programs, said Deborah Kraus, who has served as pet therapy coordinator for the humane society since 2010.

The most stringent training is required for the R.E.A.D. and CARE programs, where volunteers must be registered with Pet Partners. Pets and their owner must meet certain requirements and complete coursework (human) and behavior training (pet).

"The program offers guidelines for behavior for both the human and the animal," Kraus said.

Offering pet therapy is a natural fit for the humane society, she said.

"Part of our mission is reinforcing the human-animal bonds, and it's so very prevalent in pet therapy," she said. "Animals bring out the best in people and we see that and we want to share that with the community."

### Pet-a-Pet

This program started in 1982 and serves two dozen nursing homes, retirement and assisted living facilities and adult day care.

With 30 volunteers, it is the largest of the three therapy programs. Cats have been part of the program for a number of years.

### Reading Education Assistance Dogs

Trained owners and their Pet-Partner registered dogs visit libraries, schools and other learning programs to work with children on reading skills in this program, known as R.E.A.D. Humane society volunteers Jennifer Voss and Mary Beth Turek started the program in 2006.

Sessions take place at the Hinsdale Public Library and six other libraries in neighboring towns. Volunteers also work with a reading lab at the Burr Ridge Middle School on Saturdays.

The volunteer team will gain two new members next months.

"We have a new therapy cat, Bob, who is going to make his debut at the Hinsdale Public Library in January," Kraus said. "He walks on a leash and he sits at your feet like a dog."

### Canine Assisted Rehabilitation

The humane society's newest program, CARE was started in 2011. Owners and their dogs visit the Adventist Paulson Pediatric Rehabilitation Center in Hinsdale to help children with rehabilitation.



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half of the family's volunteer therapy team. Her husband, Jim, and Glory's litter mate, Marley, also have volunteered with the CARE program since 2011.

"It's the best thing," Wierdak said. "Both of us are just so touched by what happened and so thrilled by the fact that the dogs seem to innately understand the needs of these children."

The dogs in the humane society's Pet-a-Pet program are equally welcome at the nursing homes and assisted living facilities they visit.

Spending some time with Lilly, an old English sheep dog, was a highlight of the day Friday for Jean, a resident of the memory care unit of Eve Assisted Living in Hinsdale.

"Aren't you just beautiful," Jean told Lilly, petting her lovingly. When it was time for Lilly and her owner, Ann Casper, to go, she couldn't thank them enough.

"You just made my day," she said. "And you totally made my day, you beautiful dog," she told Lilly.

The pet visits cheer up the residents and often prompt them

to remember something from the past, such as the name of a beloved dog or cat.

"It brings back memories," said Tracey Borysko, memory care director at Eve. "We're helping to relive positive memories."

Seeing elderly residents smile is a gift for humane society volunteers, said Deborah Kraus, pet therapy coordinator.

"It is an absolutely, profoundly rewarding experience to see the look on an elderly person's face when they get a visit from a pet," Kraus said.

Perhaps even more rewarding is watching a child who has struggled experience success. Kraus recalled one boy who overcame a crippling fear of dogs by working with a series of animals, including Glory and Marley.

"He worked with both of those dogs and two years into his CARE therapy he came to our pet walk event and did tricks in front of the 400 people that were mulling around Katherine Legge that day with the two golden retrievers," Kraus said. "This was a child that was absolutely petrified of hearing a dog bark.

"You couldn't have a bigger reward."

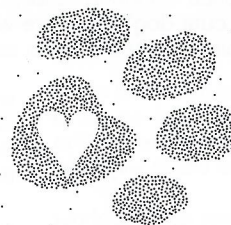


Larry, a resident of the memory care unit at Eve Assisted Living in Hinsdale, enjoys a visit with Lilly and her owner, Ann Casper, Friday afternoon. The dogs can spur residents to remember the past, provide good company and have a calming effect. "It's really important that we're able to provide those visits," memory care director Tracey Borysko said.



**Occupational therapist** Kathy Serikaku at Adventist Paulson Pediatric Rehabilitation Center said she's tried to come up with some creative ways to take advantage of having Glory in therapy sessions. Rachel loves taking the dog's picture, and it helps her work on her fine motor skills.

## Hinsdale Humane Society



22 N. Elm Street  
Hinsdale, Illinois 60521  
630.323.5630

[www.hinsdalehumanesociety.org](http://www.hinsdalehumanesociety.org)

email: [development@hinsdalehumanesociety.org](mailto:development@hinsdalehumanesociety.org)