

JENNIFER VOSS

IS WRITING A MYSTERY NOVEL • BORN AND RAISED IN GREEN BAY, WIS. • IS MOTHER TO ANNA LEE AND MITCHELL, GRANDMOTHER TO ELLEN • HAS LIVED IN HINSDALE FOR 20 YEARS • ENJOYS TRAVELING

When Jennifer Voss began volunteering at the Hinsdale Humane Society, her husband, Bill, feared his wife's compassionate nature might turn their home into a makeshift animal shelter.

Sure enough, a bedraggled rescued cat soon captured her heart.

"I thought, 'Jennifer, you have to bring that cat home,'" she recalled.

Alas, another family beat her to it, although that might have been a blessing in disguise for her marriage.

In the 18 years since then, Voss has relished opportunities to bless others with her disarmingly gentle black labs, Tex and Gus.

At the Hinsdale Public Library, for example, kids can read to her receptive canines through the PALS program.

"It's just an opportunity to relax and have a non-judgmental dog listen to you read your story," she said. "It's almost magical."

Voss is one of many who have lovingly given their time and energy over the last 60 years to the Hinsdale Humane Society, which is celebrating its anniversary with a party Aug. 24 (see Page 18 for details). In addition to its shelter at 22 N. Elm St., the agency sends volunteers into the community to bring comfort and healing where needed.

To qualify for such site visit work, volunteers and their dogs must train and be tested every two years.

Voss quickly understood the reason behind the stiff criteria when she and Tex stepped into their



Hinsdale Humane Society volunteer Jennifer Voss and her two black labs, Tex and Gus, have spread a lot of joy throughout the community with their visits to libraries, nursing homes and other sites to unleash the therapeutic effect dogs have on people. (Jim Slonoff photo)

"All the people had tennis balls on their walkers," she related humorously, which might trigger a dog's fetch response. "It's not the sort of thing you think about ahead of time."

Voss said dogs have a way of lowering people's defenses, enlivening the elderly and eliciting cherished memories of childhood pets.

"When you walk in with a dog, people perk up. They want to talk to you," Voss said.

One day while going room to room on visits, she stopped in on a male resident who was with his family. The man was unable to talk, but the beam-ing smile on his face as he pet Tex spoke volumes. Afterward, the man's wife pulled Voss aside.

"She said, 'I just want to tell you that's the first time my husband's smiled since he had a stroke,'" Voss said.

Such powerful affirmations keep her committed to the cause, along with the sheer fun of activities like the annual Pet Walk fundraiser.

At last year's event, Tex was a late entry to the eating contest to widen the pool of competitors. Apparently, he checks his mild-mannered demeanor at the doggie dish.

"He won. He's very good at eating fast," Voss said.

She said her life has been enriched by all the friends she's made and all the joy she's helped to spread through her work with the humane society.

"It's just very rewarding. You know when you walk out of the nursing home or out of the library, you made somebody's life just a little bit better."

—by Ken Knutson