

Bright Spot News

2017

The Annual Publication of Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc.
Proud to be an American Kennel Club recognized Therapy Dog Organization



Bringing comfort and caring to those who need it most



Mac, a certified Bright Spot Therapy Dog, with his teammate Mary O'Brien at the Curran-O'Brien Funeral Home where he often spends time comforting mourners.

Mac Comforts Mourners at Funeral Home

by Cynthia Hinckley

Mac is among a growing number of therapy dogs that comforts mourners at funeral homes across the country. Mac is a sweet, gentle, four year old Golden Retriever owned by Mary and TJ O'Brien of South Hadley, Massachusetts. The O'Briens, along with business partner Joe Curran, own and operate three funeral homes in western Massachusetts, the Curran-Jones Funeral Homes in Agawam and West Springfield, and the Curran-O'Brien Funeral Home in South Hadley. With their children now grown, the O'Briens decided to move into the apartment in their South Hadley funeral home. It is here that Mac works his magic.

When a friend of Mary's emailed her an article she saw on Facebook about therapy dogs being used at funeral homes to help ease the pain of loss, the O'Briens were very interested in the idea. Turning to Bright Spot, Mary moved ahead with therapy dog training. After becoming a certified Bright Spot Therapy Dog, Mac needed a job. The job of funeral home dog found Mac as he started greeting

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MISSION STATEMENT

Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc. is a registered 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to placing well-trained certified therapy dog teams in meaningful programs that provide comfort and caring through the human-canine bond. Our special volunteers serve in a wide variety of settings including hospitals, nursing homes, hospice, schools, libraries and other facilities where therapy dogs are needed.

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Editor-in-Chief – Cynthia Hinckley
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Dear Friends,

I love this time of year when I look back over the previous year and reflect on the accomplishments Bright Spot made. I can't help but let my mind wander way, way back to 1992 when I began visiting with my first therapy dog Beatrice. Here in western Massachusetts, few

facilities were open to visiting teams. By founding Bright Spot Therapy Dogs in 2004, my hope was twofold: to involve more people and dogs in therapy dog visiting and to open more doors to healthcare and educational facilities.

The energy and dedication of those who have joined Bright Spot over the past twelve years have made what was simply a vision, a reality. Our highly successful Therapy Dog Team Training Program attracts people with their dogs from all over New England, and we have requests from over 175 healthcare and educational facilities seeking our well-trained certified therapy dog teams.

Each year we break new ground, first in healthcare, then in education. From promoting wellness in the workplace, to providing stress-relief on college campuses, we have recently added comforting mourners at funeral homes to the list of ways our dedicated volunteers serve others.

None of our continued success would be possible without our donors who support our mission with the necessary funds needed to strengthen and grow our meaningful programs helping people of all ages.

In our annual issue of *Bright Spot News* we seek to offer you a glimpse into the amazing work this organization does and to highlight some of our special volunteers who make this all happen. I hope you enjoy reading this issue. Perhaps you, too, have a wonderful dog you would like to share with others, or you would like to make a donation to our work. We would love to hear from you.

Warm regards,

Cynthia Hinckley
Founder and Executive Director



Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc. is on Facebook. Please LIKE our page...

Mac Comforts Mourners...

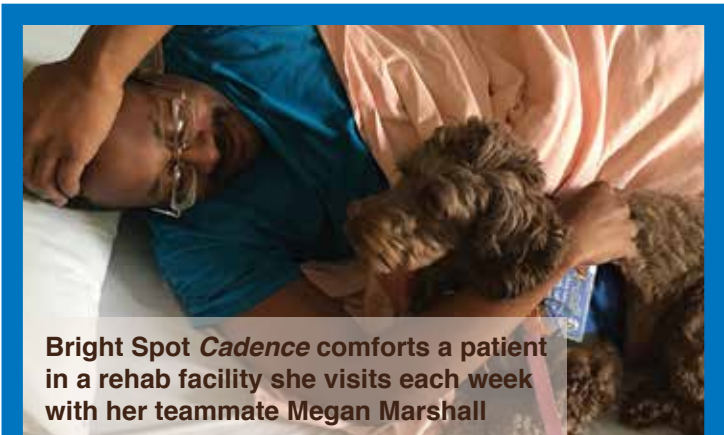
mourners at the door when they came to discuss funeral arrangements with TJ.

Mary serves as TJ's administrative assistant and *Mac* is her helper. When people come to the door, he's right there to greet them. Instead of immediately heading into the office to meet with TJ, folks linger awhile with *Mac*, who accepts all the hugs and kisses they care to give him. Funeral planning is an extremely difficult task for bereaved families. With *Mac*, they can feel free to cry and wipe their tears on his soft, satiny fur. If people like, *Mac* will accompany them into the office where he quietly sits or lies by their feet, offering the kind of gentle comfort only a dog can give.

One time, as Mary was leaving the office and heading to their apartment, looking for *Mac*, she found him making his way along a line of about seventy-five mourners waiting to go in for a wake. "They loved him. He brought smiles and even a bit of laughter to people deeply saddened by loss."

Mary calls *Mac* her sidekick. "He follows me everywhere." It was only natural, given *Mac's* friendly, outgoing personality and love for people that, once certified as a therapy dog, this would become his niche. These days, he greets mourners wearing his official Bright Spot Therapy Dog uniform consisting of blue therapy dog vest and ID badge.

Mary and TJ love the idea of sharing *Mac* with others in this way. Mary has placed a sign on the front door of each funeral home that reads: *Bright Spot Therapy Dog On The Premises*. If requested, *Mac* will help out wherever he can. At a time of such grief, this special dog relaxes people and breaks the tension by just being there. For now, *Mac* works at the Curran-O'Brien Funeral Home in South Hadley five days a week and by request at the other two homes. 🐾



Bright Spot *Cadence* comforts a patient in a rehab facility she visits each week with her teammate Megan Marshall

Certify your dog with Bright Spot...

...and experience the joy of bringing comfort and caring to those who need it most. www.bright-spot.org

The Making of a Therapy Dog

People interested in doing therapy dog work often contact us asking what steps they should take to prepare their dogs for therapy dog training. Here is the journey one recently certified Bright Spot Therapy Dog Team took to prepare.

by Cynthia Hinckley

On one of her frequent visits to the Westhampton Public Library, Nancy Ronan picked up an issue of *Bright Spot News*. The headline caught her attention and she wanted to read more. It was our 10th anniversary issue highlighting the programs we established in our first decade of *bringing comfort and caring to those who need it most*. Inside the issue, several volunteers wrote about what it meant to them to volunteer with their dogs, and facilities directors wrote about the impact the therapy dog visits had on those receiving them. All of this piqued Nancy's interest. The idea of sharing her dog with others appealed to her. An animal lover her entire life, she and her three daughters own three horses and have had several dogs through the years. Nancy knew, though, that their current dog was too old to take on the job of a therapy dog, so she tucked the idea away in the back of her mind. Someday she would do this.

Comet, a handsome, energetic Golden Retriever pup entered the Ronan household after their beloved senior dog passed. They first laid eyes on *Comet* when he and his siblings were just two weeks old. It was a litter of four—one female and three males. The Ronan's had first pick of the males at eight weeks of age.

"It was *Comet* who chose us," said Nancy. "He came right over to us and licked our faces." He made his choice and home he went with the Ronans where training began right away. Having trained five dogs before *Comet*, Nancy knew the importance of socialization, of interacting with lots of people and other dogs. She began taking *Comet* everywhere she went—outdoor concerts, the town library, Intervale Farm to pick up the family's farm share, Easthampton Feed, Westfield Feed, Dave's, Tractor Supply, the town hall on voting day, the bank, walks on the bike trail, car rides and to busy areas with lots of noise and people. Wherever dogs were allowed, *Comet* went and he was definitely showing signs of being a sociable boy.

Classes began right away, as well, first with Puppy Kindergarten where much of class time is playtime with the other puppies. The *name game* was introduced to teach the pup the very important skill of responding when his name is called. The instructor exposed the youngsters to different surfaces, like a grated surface, and items like umbrellas, hats, and other objects that might be foreign to them. In addition, the basic commands of *sit* and *down* were introduced. Basic Obedience Class followed where skills were expanded to *stay*, *come*, *heel*, and *leave it*. After a holiday break, the team of Nancy and *Comet* started up anew with Basic Agility, Intermediate Obedience, then Outdoor



Bright Spot volunteer Nancy Ronan and her therapy dog *Comet* stand ready to enter the Beaven Kelly Rest Home where they visit every Friday afternoon.

Etiquette. This class took place in Child's Park in Northampton where the dogs were exposed to real-life distractions, such as squirrels and people walking their dogs. This proved to be a challenge for *Comet* who pulled quite a bit on his leash. Nancy continued building the relationship between *Comet* and herself by taking the Canine Good Citizen and Nosework classes. All the while, Nancy kept working on *Comet's* socialization.

Comet turned a year old in May—the minimum age for a dog to start Bright Spot Therapy Dog Team Training. Nancy signed up for the next available class, giving her three months to work on *Comet's* weak points and reinforcing the skills taught in their classes. Nancy felt confident that *Comet* was well prepared and ready to give-it-a-go.

With the class sessions running two full hours, she was concerned about *Comet's* ability to hold-it-together for that length of time. "The way the class is structured, with lots of activities and practice, *Comet* settled right into the pace and we both enjoyed ourselves. The role-playing as patients using a walker, a wheelchair, a cane, and lying in bed was a lot of fun and useful. And, the array of distractions put out by the instructor to reinforce the *leave it* command was challenging and helpful."

With Therapy Dog Team Training behind them, the evalua-

— Continued on page 4

The Making of a Therapy Dog...

tion, held at an area nursing home, came next. Although the training course prepared the team with the basic skills and techniques they would use while visiting, Nancy reports that she was nervous going into the evaluation. "But the evaluator coached us through the visits, offering suggestions and tips, making the evaluation like an additional training opportunity for Comet and me, putting us both at ease." All of Nancy and Comet's work over the past twelve months paid off. Both handler and dog passed the evaluation with high marks and were ready to begin a new role as a certified Bright Spot Therapy Dog Team.

Now the final step: where to do their visiting. Having had experience working with elders, Nancy felt that Comet was a perfect nursing home dog. They now make weekly visits to the residents at the Beaven Kelly Rest Home where Comet delights the elders and staff with his outgoing, friendly personality. In addition, the team participates in our Every-Third-Saturday-of-the-Month Bright Spot Group Visits at the Soldiers Home, and our group therapy dog stress-relief events on college campuses. When Comet has had more time to mature and settle into his new role, Nancy hopes to become involved with hospice work and our Bright Spot Reading Buddy Program. 🐾

Comet with his teammate Nancy Ronan enjoy making new friends at Beaven Kelly Rest Home



Bright Spot Volunteer Maria Markenson from Boston, Massachusetts writes in...

Zoe and I attended four events during finals week around Boston. We represented Bright Spot Therapy Dogs at Hillel House on the Boston University Campus, where over 700 students attended the 2-hour stress relief event. The following day, we headed to the South End and met with students at the Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology. Stress relief opportunities during finals week continued when we participated in a 2-day event co-sponsored by Boston University Student Health Services and The Boston University Mugar Library.



Bright Spot Volunteers Karyn Cordner from West Simsbury, Connecticut and Sally King from Granby, Connecticut write in...

Our dogs Raven and James enjoy making weekly visits together at Seabury, an active life plan community in Bloomfield, Connecticut. Whether meeting folks from Assisted Living, Skilled Nursing, or the Memory Unit, Raven and James bring comfort, love, and joy. For example, one resident always sings the song "How Much is that Doggy in the Window" when she sees Raven. Another smiles broadly when she sees the dogs, then shares memories of the beloved dogs she had in her family. A terminally ill resident made everyone's heart fill with light when she held James' paw and said, "I know I will pass soon, and I think God has now sent me an escort."



L to R: Karyn Cordner with Raven and Sally King with James.

Barnes & Noble Bookstore Hosts Bright Spot Therapy Dogs Fun Day With Dogs



Bright Spot volunteer JoAnn Bernhard and her therapy dog Jake chat with a young visitor.

Twenty-two Bright Spot Therapy Dog Teams gathered at the Barnes & Noble Bookstore in Hadley, Massachusetts on Saturday, November 5, 2016 for our 2nd annual FUN DAY WITH DOGS. It was an event designed to educate people about the meaningful work therapy dogs do, to showcase a variety of dog breeds and mixed-breeds, and introduce people to fun activities they can do with their own dogs, like agility and tricks, specialized therapy dog work like Hope Crisis Response, and the Reading Buddy Program. For those interested in getting their dogs certified as therapy dogs, they had the opportunity to talk with volunteers at our information booth who explained the steps one goes through to become a certified Bright Spot Therapy Dog Team.

Along with the opportunity to educate the public about therapy dogs and the work we do through Bright Spot, we received a donation of \$678.33 from Barnes & Noble Bookstore that represented a percentage of all Hadley in-store sales on November 5th when our bookfair ID was given at check-out. We look forward to holding another FUN DAY WITH DOGS in 2017. 🐾



Peanut poses before going inside for the Read to the Dog Program.

Bright Spot Volunteer Suzanne Arnopolin from Sun City West, Arizona writes in...

Peanut and I enjoy participating in the Read to the Dog Program at The White Tank Branch Library in Wadell, Arizona. Weekly, school age children are allowed to sign up for one-on-one time to practice their reading. Peanut works for about an hour, with each child reading for a 10-minute time slot. This program is very popular. There is always a wait list for kids to get a chance to read with the dog. We are now doing the program twice a week so more children get to participate. The kids love it. They show Peanut their favorite page in their book and when Peanut checks it out, they get to give him his reading treat. The White Tank Branch Library is gorgeous, with floor to ceiling glass walls overlooking cacti, scrub brush, and the White Tank Mountain Range.



Reading Buddy Peanut sits next to one of his young readers at The White Tank Branch Library.

Thank You to Our Donors

2016 Annual Report of Giving

Thanks to the growing support we receive from donors, foundations, and sponsors, in its twelfth year, Bright Spot has been able to build on its legacy of providing comfort and caring to people of all ages through visits from our highly trained therapy dog teams. We extend our deep appreciation for your support. You make it possible to continue the meaningful work provided by Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc. Your gift has made a difference in the lives of many. From all of us at Bright Spot, Thank you!

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In honor of Angel
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In honor of Arlo and Cate
Helen Comeau
In honor of Dolly
Diane Gould
In honor of Trevor
Susan and Cary Jubinville
In honor of May
James and Gira Manferdini
In honor of Rocco
Megan and JA Marshall
In honor of Cadence
Sandra Raines
In honor of Siena
Cindy Trahan-Liptak
In honor of Axel

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In memory of *Holly*
- Michelle Karb
In memory of *Tucker* (Damon)
- Michelle Karb
In memory of *Shilo*
- Michelle Karb
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- Michelle and Richard Karb
In memory of *Coco, Toby and Molly*
- Mary Ann Keefe
In memory of *Lukey*
- David and Dollinda Lund
In memory of *Coco and Toby*
- Alan Maclaren
In memory of *Tucker* (Maclaren)
- Irene McGourty
In memory of *Otis*
- Mikki Nevins
In memory of *Tucker* (Damon)
- Katherine Osborne
In memory of *Dehli*

Become a Bright Spot Donor

YES – I would like to make a donation to support the programs provided by **Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc.** Enclosed is my check for:

- \$25 \$50 \$75 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$750
- Leadership \$1,000+

Please make checks payable to **Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc.** and mail to:
Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc., P. O. Box 132, Leeds, MA 01053-0132

Donor's Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip: Phone: _____

Email: _____

Special instructions for gift (in honor of, in memory of, other)

If any: name and mailing address of the person we should notify regarding your gift



- Susan and Daniel Rogers
In memory of *Tucker* (Maclaren)
- Nancy Ronan
In memory of *Finn* (Ronan)
- Dorothy Surgeon
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- Trina Weiswasser
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Donations reported here run from January 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016. All donations received after December 31, 2016, will be reported in the 2018 issue of Bright Spot News.

Bright Spot Therapy Dogs

P. O. Box 132
Leeds, MA 01053-0132



Miss Emma Pickle



Kaezli

Meet Miss Emma Pickle and Kaezli, and all our Bright Spots at www.bright-spot.org

For information on how to become a Bright Spot Therapy Dog Team visit www.bright-spot.org

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Calendar of Events

Along with the individual visits our volunteer therapy dog teams make to hospice placements, nursing homes, hospitals, Alzheimer's units, mental health facilities, and schools, group therapy dog events are held throughout the year that serve to promote our mission and to educate the community about therapy dogs and the special work they do.

Here's Where We'll Be in 2017...

EVERY MONTH

Third-Saturday-Of-The-Month Visits to The Soldiers' Home, Holyoke, MA

JANUARY

Pioneer Valley Education Collaborative School Bus Drivers Therapy Dog Stress-Relief Event

FEBRUARY

- The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art February School Vacation Week Bright Spot Reading Buddy Program
- University of Massachusetts Amherst Therapy Dog Stress-Relief Event during mid-term exams

APRIL

- Athol Public Library – Talk: Therapy Dogs, What They Do and How They Are Trained

- The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art April School Vacation Week Bright Spot Reading Buddy Program
- Western New England University Therapy Dog Stress-Relief Event during finals week
- University of Massachusetts Amherst Therapy Dog Stress-Relief Event during finals week

MAY

Bay Path University Therapy Dog Stress-Relief Event during finals week

JUNE

South Hadley Public Library – Talk: Therapy Dogs, What They Do and How They Are Trained

JULY & AUGUST

The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art Summer Reading Buddy Program-every Monday afternoon throughout the summer

SEPTEMBER

Greenfield Community College Welcome Back Picnic

OCTOBER

University of Massachusetts Amherst Therapy Dog Stress-Relief Event during mid-term exams

NOVEMBER

Barnes & Noble Bookstore hosts Bright Spot Therapy Dogs FUN DAY WITH DOGS

DECEMBER

- University of Massachusetts Amherst Therapy Dog Stress-Relief Event during finals week
- Western New England University Therapy Dog Stress-Relief Event during finals week
- Bay Path University Therapy Dog Stress-Relief Event during finals week