

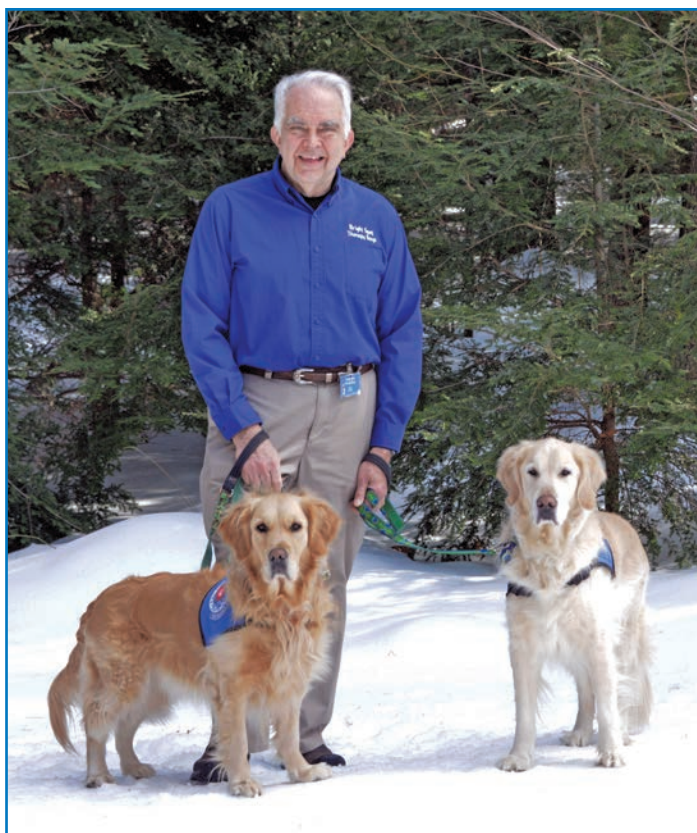
N Bright Spot News

2019

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

Celebrating Our 15th Anniversary

Bright Spot Volunteers Living Our Mission



Volunteer Ned Polan and his Bright Spots Nutmeg and Brinkley

In 2011, I read a newspaper article about the amazing work of Bright Spot Therapy Dogs. Brinkley, my 8-month-old Golden Retriever puppy, had just earned his AKC Canine Good Citizen Title. I had just retired early from a career in industrial research management and wanted to redirect my efforts to meaningful, socially significant causes. For a while I volunteered with a group of retired executives helping people start up new businesses - comfortable, given my background, but just not the challenge of doing something new, different and fulfilling.

I decided to research therapy dog organizations. In 2012, we applied to Bright Spot, which looked especially attractive because they already had a list of facilities waiting for dogs to visit. After therapy dog team training and evalua-

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Bringing comfort to those who need it most.



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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.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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*Please submit stories, news bytes, and/or photos
for consideration to cynthia@bright-spot.org*



Dear Friends,

As we celebrate our 15th Anniversary, Bright Spot Therapy Dogs has much to be proud of. We entered 2019 having completed our strongest year to date, showing growth in every area of operations. It truly is an exciting time in the history of our developing organization!

This milestone is a time to reflect on how far we have come since our beginning days with just a handful of volunteers sharing their beloved dogs with the few assisted living facilities in our local area of western Massachusetts that showed a flicker of interest in having us visit. Today, our volunteers number over 200 covering all of New England and parts of New York state. And, from just a few assisted living facilities in 2004, we now have over 225 healthcare, educational, and business facilities requesting our services, all recognizing the value of the human-canine bond.

As a no-fee for service, non-profit organization, we hold in highest esteem our dedicated volunteers who tirelessly give of their time living our mission of *bringing comfort and caring to those who need it most*. We dedicate our 15th Anniversary issue of *Bright Spot News* to our wonderful volunteers and offer our readers a sampling of what a few of our teams are doing. Many of our volunteers are retired from formal work life and have chosen to offer their time and expertise to Bright Spot Therapy Dogs. I am certain you will enjoy reading these inspiring stories.

With every one of our training classes running at full capacity in 2018, we added an additional class this year and, if needed, we are poised to add another. Our many new volunteer teams inject the organization with an energy and desire to carry out our mission. This continued stream of new blood, coupled with the dedicated volunteers who have given their service for many years, keep our established programs in hospice care, Alzheimer's units, hospitals, assisted living facilities, mental health facilities, schools, libraries, colleges and universities, veterans facilities, and the airport running strong and help create new programs wherever our therapy dogs can be of help.

We are honored to have received a Florence Bank Customers' Choice Grant last year and to have been chosen by Florence Bank to have our special Third-Saturday-of-the-Month Program at the Soldiers Home appear in a television commercial. Clips of the commercial and the story of Bright Spot Therapy Dogs can be viewed on <https://www.florencebank.com/beat-blog-brightspot-therapy-dogs>. This, along with the ever-growing support of our generous donors and foundations who believe in the meaningful work our therapy dog teams do, are what make all of this possible.

Warmest regards,

Cynthia

Cynthia Hinckley
Founder and Executive Director

Bright Spot Volunteers Living Our Mission *continued*

tion, we were accepted! I was hoping to participate in the children's Reading Buddy Program, but Brinkley had too much energy and was too squirmy to sit still and listen to stories. With considerable trepidation, we signed up to visit an adult daycare facility. On our first visit, Brinkley led me straight to a lady who had never spoken a word to anyone there (Brinkley has always had the remarkable ability to pick out people in distress and give them wagging good attention). He put his chin on her knee, she smiled, scratched his ears, and animatedly told him the names and stories of all the farm animals and pets of her childhood. The staff was amazed. Brinkley did ALL the heavy lifting! And I was hooked!

Such events occurred repeatedly, with all sorts of people. One lady, who spoke little English, belted out the song *How Much is that Doggie in the Window?* every time she saw Brinkley. I saw firsthand that people under stress or in crisis often avoid or reject human interaction but respond enthusiastically to dogs. Such experiences led me to seek out more and more challenging, less comfortable, situations where we could help people who had been overwhelmed by emotional or behavioral burdens. We started to visit a program for youth with major behavioral issues - they were great,



Nutmeg visits with a veteran at The Soldiers Home.



Brinkley at the Suicide Prevention Walk.

loved Brinkley's visits, and made paintings of him, which they proudly presented to me. We added more facilities and encountered many remarkable people. We now make weekly visits to an inpatient behavioral health facility, a hospital physical rehabilitation unit, a crisis stabilization home, and a residence for veterans. We have also assisted in critical incident stress debriefing sessions for hospital emergency departments after especially traumatic cases.

Sometimes patients enjoy startling us. On Halloween, one patient hid under a blanket and released a LOUD hair-raising wolf howl. Brinkley approached him, paused, and then joined



Meg providing comfort.

in the howl. That confirmed us as Members of the Pack! Now, seven years later, at that facility we're often requested to lead a group howl. One time a lady tossed cheese crackers on the floor for Brinkley and gave me a bear hug. Another time someone exclaimed, "These pretzels are making me thirsty," signaling a spontaneous *Seinfeld* TV show quotation trivia contest. Brinkley also entertains, when appropriate, with popcorn catching, candlepin bowling or reading (he recognizes flash cards with the commands Sit, Stand, Down, Around, Front). Primarily though, he absorbs stress and helps people, if only briefly, live in the moment, forgetting the past, and not worrying about the future. Patients, clients, residents, and staff constantly thank us for coming, and we thank them for inviting us. They do as much for us as we do for them.

In 2017, Brinkley's niece Nutmeg became a Bright Spot and now shares his increasing workload. Just last week, Meg visited someone who had not spoken for a long time. As I was restraining her wiggly approach, the person reached out to hug her, felt her collar and said, "Too tight!" Like our first day seven years ago, the staff was amazed. And I reaffirmed choosing the correct path.



Health Fair Official Greeter Meg relaxes after a busy day.

Brinkley now holds the American Kennel Club's highest title: Distinguished Therapy Dog, and Meg holds the next-to-highest: Therapy Dog Excellent. Between them, they make about 200 visits annually to facilities, helping people meet the challenges of regaining control of their lives. We frequently meet the same people later, sometimes years later, on the street, in stores, sometimes back in the institutions where we first met. They always remember that we were there, that we cared, and that we provided comfort when they really needed it. They always thank us, and we always thank them for the privilege of sharing their experiences and lives. 🐾

From Dark Moments Come Bright Spots

by Michelle Karb



Ace is a black lab mix and an amputee. Pepé is a deaf pit bull mix. Ace's journey began in rural Tennessee. Pepé's journey began in Orlando, Florida. Both Ace and Pepé endured harrowing beginnings, but both found loving and devoted handlers willing to embrace disability as uniqueness, giving them the patience and love they needed to blossom into amazing Bright Spot Therapy Dogs.

ACE: Becky Walton read about Ace's story on Facebook. He had been found tangled in black mesh alongside his littermates, already dead. Dehydrated and starving, he needed emergency front right leg amputation surgery to survive. Becky donated online to the cause.

When his first adoption plans fell through, Becky offered to take Ace. Becky had recently seen a short video about a canine amputee inspiring a child amputee and, if Ace had the appropriate personality, Becky vowed to involve him in therapy work. When Ace first came to live with Becky, he was a somewhat shy and timid six-month-old puppy with a lot of energy. Becky immediately began training and socializing him.

People who met Ace loved him, and Ace loved all people. When people asked about his missing leg, Becky shared Ace's compelling story of survival, and people felt even more connected to him. At one point after coming to live with Becky, Ace ate a toy and again required emergency surgery. Though he nearly died, his strength pulled him through. This resilient dog HAD to do something special with his life.



PEPE: Liesl Swogger was driving to her home in Orlando when she spotted Pepé beside

a busy six-lane street in front of a pawnshop and strip club. She stopped, scooped up the white flea-covered puppy, and drove him to what would be his new home. Pepé was approximately twelve weeks old.

Since Pepé is a pit bull mix, and pit bulls have a bad reputation, Liesl wanted to begin his training and socialization immediately. Pepé responded well to visual cues but seemed to ignore Liesl's verbal commands. After a trainer suggested that Pepé might not be able to hear, Liesl took him to a specialist where it was confirmed that he was completely deaf. Although he had immense puppy energy, it was obvious that Pepé was very smart and attentive. Liesl and Pepé lived in a dog-friendly area, and they went everywhere together.



By the time he was eighteen months old, Pepé had calmed down and began focusing more on Liesl as they participated in Canine Good Citizenship training. Everywhere they went, people were drawn to Pepé. Liesl would tell people he was deaf, instructing them to give the thumbs-up sign – this was Pepé's cue that he had done something good. As soon as someone gave the sign, an immediate connection between human and dog was made. Liesl knew she had to do something meaningful with this remarkable dog.

ACE: Ace will be four later this year. He and Becky were certified with Bright Spot in 2017. Ace visits veterans at the Holyoke Soldiers Home and the VA. He works with cancer and hospice patients at Baystate Medical, participates in College



Stress Relief Events, and will be honored for his work at center ice at an upcoming Springfield Thunderbirds game. Becky says she has a difficult time keeping up with his busy schedule.

Becky explains that Ace is as mobile and energetic as a dog with four legs. She gives him a joint supplement to preserve the weight-bearing front shoulder, and she watches his weight to avoid adding any unnecessary strain to it. Otherwise, Ace is just like any other dog.

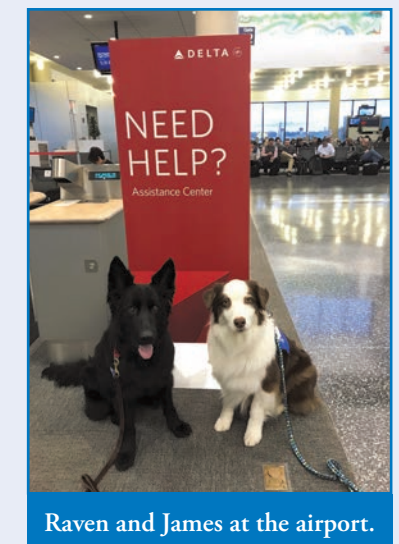
PEPE: Pepé will also be four later this year. He and Liesl moved to Massachusetts and became certified with Bright Spot in 2017. Pepé works with preschoolers at the Clarke school in Northampton and will soon become a Reading Buddy at Westhampton Elementary School. He also attends College Stress Relief Events and participates in other activities where therapy dogs are needed.

Liesl hopes Pepé is an ambassador for his breed and for deaf dogs. She encourages people to not shy away from adopting deaf dogs, explaining that they can be very trainable, relying on their other senses.

Neither Ace nor Pepé knows he is disabled. As only dogs can, both love unconditionally and live in the moment. Fortunately, Becky and Liesl recognized the immense potential in Ace and Pepé, choosing to love these special dogs and to share them with others. 🐾

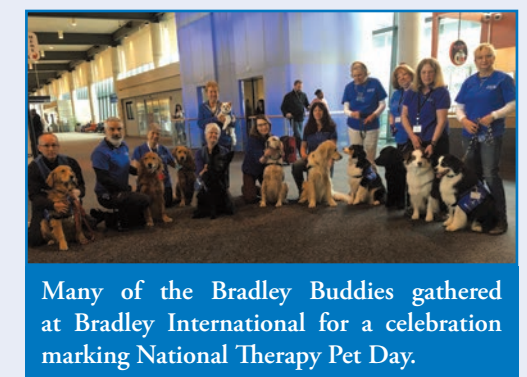
Bradley Buddies Receive High Praise

Our Bradley Buddies Program at Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks, CT took "flight" just last year with two Bright Spot volunteers, Karyn Cordner and Sally King spearheading the pilot program with their dogs Raven and James. Immediately on take-off, the program launched full speed ahead with an abundance of praise from travelers departing and arriving via Bradley. Just a handful of airports in the United States have such a program in operation, and passengers can't stop talking about it.



Raven and James at the airport.

The Buddies have kept young children occupied while waiting for a delayed flight, have comforted those traveling to the funeral of a loved one, or sending a son or daughter off to the service. People travel for all kinds of reasons, we've learned, and the Buddies are on hand to assist those in need of a gentle, furry friend to hug. We are pleased that a total of fourteen teams are volunteering their time with this program. Buddies are now at the airport every day of the week at varying times. When traveling to or from Bradley, be on the lookout for our dogs in their special blue Bradley Buddies vest accompanied by their handlers wearing our blue Bright Spot shirts. They'd love to say hello! 🐾



Many of the Bradley Buddies gathered at Bradley International for a celebration marking National Therapy Pet Day.

Volunteers Living Our Mission



Volunteer Helen Comeau and her Bright Spot Dolly.

My little Shih Tzu, Dolly, and I have been a Bright Spot Team since 2014. I am a retired geriatric nurse and enjoy bringing Dolly to visit with the elderly. Dolly loves everyone that we visit, and the folks at the assisted living facility really look forward to our weekly visits. So many have told me that when they moved into the retirement home, they also had to leave behind pets! I can't imagine! I have told them that I am happy to share Dolly with them, and I think that we fill a void with lots of folks. It's certainly a fun and fulfilling way to volunteer. 🐾



Volunteer Marianne MacCaffrey and Bright Spot Emma Pickle report to Newton School for their Reading Buddy session.

For 35 years I was a reading teacher in several western Massachusetts schools. Learning to read is a process that some students handle with ease, while other students struggle with learning to read for a long time. Both groups need to celebrate their progress and cement their love of reading. That's where my Emma Pickle comes into the picture. My happy Golden Retriever is a Bright Spot Reading Buddy! For the past five years, Emma Pickle has visited the Newton School in Greenfield, MA. All the third-grade students have a chance to read to Emma Pickle. She listens with a loving, non-judgmental ear and celebrates their every word and the act of reading. Emma Pickle has become part of the Newton family. She has a hello for everyone she meets. For me, I get to enjoy the best thing about school - the students! 🐾



Volunteer Wayne Desroches with his Bright Spots (l-r) Milo and Max.

Seven years ago, near the beginning of my retirement as the Postmaster of Holyoke, MA, I was looking forward to the upcoming annual Greyhound Options Oktoberfest, a fun gathering of pups and people with the same interest. This particular year, I learned that representatives from Bright Spot Therapy Dogs would be present. Many years earlier I had heard of alternate therapy methods to help people. Music, art, and pet therapy programs were showing great success in reaching people who may have not responded or made progress with other treatments. It was time for me to do a little research beforehand, as I hoped to talk to them that day. The more I learned, the more I felt that my greyhound Max had the right disposition and character to help others. Little did I know what was ahead.

Today, Max and I are bringing smiles and comfort to many. Even better, soon after Max became a Bright Spot Therapy Dog, I added another greyhound to our team. Milo, who happens to pass at first glance as Max's twin, became Max's buddy. Together, they are the stars and I am proud to be their chauffeur. Currently, they visit Mary's Meadow and Providence Place, both assisted living facilities, every other Monday. Every Wednesday, each gets his turn as a Reading Buddy at E. N. White Elementary School in Holyoke. Both see six students per visit. Max and Milo love "listening" to the many wonderful stories read to them by the students who range from kindergarteners to fifth graders. In addition, Milo is a monthly Reading Buddy at the Granby Free Public Library. When their busy schedule can fit it in, they make a difference at the Holyoke Soldiers Home and, many times over the years, they have visited at least five different colleges during exam periods. This past Veterans Day, Max, Milo, and I appeared on WWLP TV Channel 22 *Mass Appeal*. I felt very proud of my dogs as I told viewers how they make a difference in the lives of the veterans we visit.

Four years ago, I was offered the opportunity to become an evaluator for Bright Spot Therapy Dogs. An evaluator meets with each new team in an assisted living facility once it has passed the Bright Spot Therapy Dog Team Training course. Here, it is the responsibility of the evaluator

to ensure the new team meets the criteria to become certified with Bright Spot by demonstrating the skills and techniques taught in class. I am grateful for this opportunity that offers me a chance to share my experiences with these new teams to better prepare them to have positive and rewarding visits. 🐾

The "Bright Spot family" is far more than just a group of volunteers. We all have a common goal of helping those in need by sharing our special dogs. Watching the difference our teams make, the pride our volunteers have in their pups, and the connections made through the natural joy that Bright Spot pups bring is such a wonderful experience. Being part of this is an education with each visit, each interaction, each smile or word spoken, as Max and Milo are welcomed by their new friends. 🐾

Bright Spot Receives 2018 Florence Bank Customers' Choice Community Grant



Receiving the award at a gala reception held at the Garden House in Northampton, MA. are (l-r) Bright Spot Executive Director Cynthia Hinckley and Board Member/Treasurer Nancy Ronan.

The Customers' Choice Community Grants Program is an annual offering founded in 2002, through which Florence Bank customers are invited to vote for their favorite local nonprofit in hopes it will receive a share of grant funding. Bright Spot Therapy Dogs is honored to be among the wonderful non-profit organizations that received a 2018 Florence Bank Customers' Choice Community Grant. We extend a heartfelt Thank You to all the customers who voted for us in 2018. Voting for the 2019 Grants runs January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019. Please consider voting for us again this year. The Grant will be used to train new therapy dog teams which will strengthen our established programs in healthcare, education, and business facilities bringing comfort and caring through the human-canine bond. 🐾

Why I Give

by Nancy Rule



Photo courtesy of Nancy Rule.

I will be forever grateful to Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, retired volunteer Dottie Burke, and her beloved Bright Spot Therapy Dog, Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Maggie. It was early evening on Tuesday, November 21, 2006 when I noticed Dottie Burke and Maggie's arrival. They had an appointment to visit the gentleman in the room next door to my husband's room at Cooley Dickinson Hospital. Because of the gentleman's unplanned procedure, their visit was cancelled. I asked Dottie if she would please bring Maggie in to see my husband. Although visits are normally preapproved and scheduled in advance, Dottie agreed to bring sweet Maggie in, but only for a few minutes. Beautiful Maggie nested herself quietly on Roy's lap. When it was time for Dottie to go, Maggie did not want to leave Roy's side. It was clear to us that Maggie could sense that Roy was near the end of his life. Because of that special connection, wonderful Dottie brought sweet Maggie back the next morning for another very special visit with Roy.

My husband, Roy E. Rule, passed on Thanksgiving Day, November 23, 2006. Donations to Bright Spot continue in my husband's memory, 12 years after his death. A great legacy especially because I was told Roy was the first person for which memorial donations were sent to Bright Spot Therapy Dogs in lieu of funeral flowers. 🐾

2018 Community Outreach Events

Highlighting a Few of the Community Events Attended



Dave's Dock Dogs Event

Pictured are Brian Schick and Jeeves manning our information booth during Dave's Dock Dogs Event. The exciting Dock Dogs competition took place June 1-3 at Dave's Soda and Pet City in Agawam, MA.



Barnes & Noble Fun Day with Dogs

Twenty-eight Bright Spot Therapy Dog Teams gathered at Barnes & Noble Bookstore in Hadley, MA on November 3rd to host our 4th Annual Fun Day with Dogs. Shoppers were treated to a host of dog-related activities like agility and tricks training, along with the opportunity to talk to our volunteers about the meaningful work our therapy dogs do for people of all ages, and to spend time hanging out with our special dogs. *Pictured l-r:* a shopper chatting with Alex Deschamps with Peanut and Megan Marshall with Cadence.



Worthington 250th Anniversary Parade

On June 30th, a contingent of Bright Spots and their handlers marched in the Worthington, MA, 250th Anniversary parade. Pepé and Comet had the honor of visiting with Worthington veterans at the end of the parade route.



National Dog Day Event

Bright Spots and their handlers enjoyed the Paws Park in Greenfield, MA during the National Dog Day Celebration on August 25th. *Pictured l-r:* Wayne Desroches with Max and Milo, Nancy Ronan with Comet and Clementine, and Sarah Madison with Emma.



Holiday Yappy Hour

Bright Spot Ellie greeted visitors to our Bright Spot information booth during Holiday Yappy Hour, a fun evening for dogs and their owners at The Good Dog Spot in Chicopee on December 1st.



Out of the Darkness Walk

Our Bright Spots were happy to offer comfort and paws at the Out of the Darkness Suicide Awareness Walk on October 20th in Agawam, MA. *Pictured l-r:* Ned Polan with Brinkley, Linda Robins with Rosie, Wayne Desroches with Max and Milo, Alex Deschamps with Peanut, Nancy Ronan with Comet, Cathy Bussolari with Frigo, and Emily Slotnick with Annie Baker.

Thank You to Our Donors

2018 Annual Report of Giving

We extend our deepest appreciation to our donors, foundations, and sponsors. Thanks to your continued support, we have reached our 15th Anniversary, and with your help, we look forward to continued growth as we build on our legacy of providing wellness to people of all ages through visits from our highly trained therapy dog teams. From all of us at **Bright Spot Therapy Dogs**, Thank you! Your gift has made a difference in the lives of many.

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Richard and Michelle Karb
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In memory of *Lukey*

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In memory of *Gizmo*

David and Dollinda Lund
In memory of *Jack*

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In memory of *Rocco, Guido, and Sundance*

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In memory of *Meadow*

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Bright Spot Therapy Dogs

P.O. Box 132

Leeds, MA

01053-0132



Peanut



Woody

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www.bright-spot.com

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

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- ☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$75 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$750
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Donor's Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip Code: _____ 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:



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