

An exclusive magazine serving the residents of New Lenox

NEW LENOX

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Neighbors



SILVER CROSS HOSPITAL



Pet Therapy Lifts Spirits at Silver Cross Hospital

Meet Some Caring K9s



Best Version Media

Cover photo by
Scott Duff



Pet Therapy Lifts Spirits at Silver Cross Hospital

Meet Some Caring K9s

By Taylor Leddin
Photos by Scott Duff
Indoor photos courtesy Silver Cross Hospital

With a storied history dating back to the original Joliet hospital location in 1895, Silver Cross Hospital has been providing the community with expert medical care. The New Lenox campus opened in 2012 and many of the wonderful programs that made the original operation so successful have continued at the new facility.

One of those successful programs that moved to New Lenox is Silver Cross Pet Therapy, which began in Joliet in 2009. Pet Therapy is designed to bring joy and comfort to patients during their stay. The program is headed by Director of Volunteer Services and Customer Service Ambassadors Laura Valencik.

NOTE: While the current coronavirus pandemic has kept the hospital on virtual lockdown from anyone not considered essential to its operations, the Pet Therapy volunteers are ready to return as soon as it is safe for patients and volunteers.

“We knew that pet therapy was well received in other hospitals and nursing homes, and we wanted to bring that same joy to our patients, visitors, and staff,” says Valencik. “Studies show that petting a dog can provide a soothing presence and provide a sense of companionship, help people with loneliness, and cope with stress. Let’s face it, if you like dogs, they just make you smile!”



Positive Feedback

The program is doing what it’s intended to do, as patients’ feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Research points to the company of friendly canines as helping to ease pain, depression, anxiety, and fatigue. Even the world-famous nurse, Florence Nightingale, was a supporter of a dog’s positive impact on a patient. She once stated “a small pet animal is an excellent companion for the sick.”

Valencik supports this claim as she explains that the program is like a “magnet” in the lobby and that patients and visitors naturally gravitate to the fluffy volunteers. While the dogs are in high-demand and tend to stick to a pre-determined visiting schedule, they often get stopped by passersby on their way to the next scheduled visit.

The team of dogs also visits organizations and schools in the community with special needs. Each dog is certified for their volunteer work, many through a Canine Good Citizens Program.

“All of our dogs are certified with TDI – Therapy Dogs International,” says Valencik. There are dogs of all breeds and sizes, fit for someone who likes to cuddle with a small, fluffy pup or someone who appreciates the beauty of a larger dog. “We have



Pictured (clockwise from top) are Elice and Tux; Mark and Colleen; Celene and Lucy; Connie and Bella; and Bonnie and Daisy.

had giant dogs in the program like Great Danes and a small toy Yorkie. People love them all, and the dogs are well trained to be a friendly visitor and bring comfort and joy.”

Meet the Stars

Members of the friendly dog team include: Asta, a 5-year old Wire Hair Fox Terrier; Bailey, a 6-year old Toy Lab; Colleen Renee, a 2-year old AKC Registered Golden Retriever; Connie Sue’s Lil Bella Boo, a 9-year old AKC Registered Yorkshire Terrier; Sterling Blue Comet an 8-year old Siberian Husky; Daisy, a 6-year old Snoodle (Schnauzer/Poodle); Elsa, a 13-year old Labrador Retriever; Flower, a 9-year old Chihuahua; Hope, an 11-year old Yellow Labrador Retriever; Kasey, a 12-year old AKC Standard Poodle; Kato, an 8-year old German Shepherd; Raspberry Woods Lucy Loo (aka Lucy), a 4-year old AKC Registered Standard Poodle; Piranha Banana, a 12-year old Chihuahua; Princess, a 7-year old mixed breed; Ranger, a 4-year old Wire Hair Fox Terrier; Summer, a Labrador Retriever; Tuxedo, an 8-year old Shih Tzu Poodle (ShihPoo); Zooezy, a 4-year old Australian Kelpie.



Special Moments

Many memories and special moments have occurred over the years as the result of this beneficial program, making it clear of its significance to the Silver Cross community.

“For example, when they’re in the middle of a visit on our Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit, and the patient reaches out and pets the dog or says dog or the dog’s name, and you see the family member and staff moved to tears. You quickly catch on that this patient doesn’t normally do this, and it’s amazing to have the opportunity to be part of that moment,” says Valencik.

“Or, someone might be nervous prior to having a test or surgery done, and the dog is brought in to help calm them. There are lots

of stories people tell us about the dogs they once owned or the dogs they have at home that they are missing while they are in the hospital.”

Some of the time, the positive feedback doesn’t even come through words but simply through expression and interaction. “It is amazing how you can see a person’s entire demeanor change when they begin to pet the dog,” says Valencik. “We are glad to be able to help.”

For more information on Silver Cross Hospital’s Pet Therapy program, call 815-300-7975 or visit www.silvercross.org.