

Licking Loneliness



Gretchen Blackburn

Therapy Pet Pals of Texas (TPPT) was very proud to learn that our cherished Pet Pal volunteers, Gretchen Blackburn and her wonderful Bearded Collie Patrick, had been honored with the Therapy Dog of the Year Award by the Bearded Collie Club of America! All our members share

the joy of knowing how much the **2008 Andrew Award** means to Patrick and Gretchen, and we know “first-hand” just how truly deserving they are to be the recipients of this award!

Since joining TPPT in October 1999, Gretchen has proven to be “the volunteer” that all organizations dream of having. Her decade of service has been instrumental in the success and growth that we’ve enjoyed over the past ten years. From the beginning, her unshakable commitment to pet therapy was obvious and her dedication was a perfect example for all volunteers to follow.

Aside from her faithful visits to nursing homes and hospitals, Gretchen has taken on many extra responsibilities for TPPT. She serves as an instructor and evaluator at qualifying/training classes for new applicants and a trainer/coordinator for North Austin Medical Center in Austin, Texas. Gretchen and Patrick have shared their special brand of “pet therapy love” with a countless number of grateful patients and have given a lot of sad, lonely people a reason to smile and forget their pain.

Gretchen has always taken on numerous and varied responsibilities for TPPT. No job has ever been too big or too small for her to undertake and she’s excelled in all positions. Because of her sterling reputation and work ethics, Gretchen was nominated and unanimously voted to be chairperson of our Special Events Committee. This is one of the most vitally important and demanding committees in our organization. In addition to their weekly visits, Gretchen and her committee members give up many weekends to participate in numerous community activities. These Pet Pal volunteers show the community the value of the human/animal bond, the important role pets play in today’s society, and how vital pets are for the well-being of their humans. The Special Events Committee is our best tool in recruiting new volunteers and Gretchen never tires in her desire to educate the public on the importance of pet therapy visitation programs.

In my 25 years with TPPT, I’ve never known a more caring, compassionate and hard-working volunteer than Gretchen Blackburn. It’s been my great privilege, pleasure and honor to have shared many rewarding volunteer experiences with her during the past 10 years. She’s received every accolade and honor that TPPT bestows. We hold Gretchen in highest esteem and believe her to be a most worthy recipient of any and all honors bestowed on her. *Thank you for honoring our superb volunteer!*

—Kathryn R. Lashmit
TPPT Founder, Executive Director

Perfect Partners



“Patrick”

Shanasree Aim Fora Far Post, CGC, HIC

Patrick was born to be a therapy dog. He’s known as the “biggest lap dog” in the Therapy Pet Pals of Texas program because he’s happiest when he’s sharing the bed or lap of one of his senior friends at the nursing home.

His gentleness and soulful eyes capture the hearts of all who meet him. *Well, almost everyone!* One resident enjoys teasing us by threatening to cut Patrick’s hair. Another lady, who must have a reserved wheelchair parking space at the entrance of the facility, greets us with “Get that dog outta here!”

Mostly, we’re welcomed visitors and enjoy sharing special moments with those we encounter. One gentleman was sitting with his mother who was in the latter stages of Alzheimer’s. Patrick approached her wheelchair, laid his head in her lap and looked up at her with his big, brown eyes. The woman’s son asked, “Do you see the dog, Momma?” She looked down and smiled for the first time in four years. Her son’s tear-filled eyes said it all. Then, in an instant, the smile was gone and she retreated back into her silent world.

Patrick has had his share of “Beardie moments”, too. He’s been labeled the “doggy dry cleaner” because he happily cleans the laps of residents who just ate dinner — and then there’s the time when he goosed a sleeping resident with his cold, wet nose right where the hospital gown doesn’t close! Startled that poor lady out of a great nap!

At this year’s specialty, Patrick and I were presented with the 2008 Andrew Award. I wish he could understand just how much of an honor this is. My best guess is he’d think it’s like scoring a box of Chick-fil-A nuggets!

— Gretchen S. Blackburn