

# Volunteer Edmonton

# Four-legged friends

### Special to The Examiner

Deb Bok recounts a story about a young girl who was bucked off her horse and required medical treatment at the hospital.

Inconsoleable and upset, no one could calm her down – except for a dog that happened to be visiting hospital patients. “The dog came in and laid down right next to the girl,” she says. “And just like that, she calmed right down. That’s what animals can do.”

As a board member for the Pet Therapy Society of Northern Alberta, Deb has seen firsthand the positive impact animals have on people.

One of her first encounters was also at a hospital.

“I had gone in for a checkup and I noticed the dogs and how people were so happy to see them,” Deb says.

That’s when she decided to enroll her own dogs and become a volunteer.

But it’s not just dogs. The Pet Therapy Society also includes cats, rabbits, horses and even reptiles in their animal-assisted programs. The non-profit organization, operating since 1992, originally began in hospitals, visiting patients.

“We saw that animals were working in the hospitals and we branched out from there,” Deb says, adding that their PAWS for a Visit program now operates in nursing homes, care centres and even corrections facilities.

The PAWS for a Story utilizes

animals to help children struggling with reading to practice in a safe environment free from judgment and correction.

“The kids feel more comfortable reading out loud when they have an animal with them,” she says.

PAWSibilities is another program that uses animal-assisted activities to help enhance the physical, cognitive, emotional, social and leisure development of clients with special needs.

For anyone who has lost a pet, Deb points out that PAWS to Remember is a wonderful support service for those grieving their loss.

What’s remarkable about the Pet Therapy Society is that the

organization is almost entirely volunteer-run.

“We have one staff person to help out in the office,” Deb says.

She estimates the organization has about 280 people who help out in various ways.

The Pet Therapy Society will be holding a Hot Dogs for Hot Dogs fundraising gala on March 13 at the Fort Edmonton Park, Blatchford Field Air Hangar at 5 p.m.

To learn more about the gala or how to become a volunteer for the Pet Therapy Society of Northern Alberta, visit [www.pettherapysociety.com](http://www.pettherapysociety.com).

For story suggestions, contact Eveyln Phan, communications co-ordinator, at [epheam@volunteeredmonton.com](mailto:epheam@volunteeredmonton.com) or call 780-732-6655.



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Pets are definitely good for what ails you.

“The dog came in and laid down right beside the girl. Just like that, she calmed right down.”

– Deb Bok

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