

# Bright Spot Therapy Dogs

PO Box 282  
West Brookfield, MA  
01585



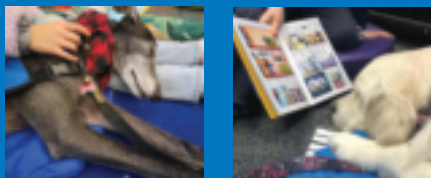
Tundra



Fergus

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Bright Spot Therapy Dog Team  
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# Bright Spot News

2023

Proud to be an  
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Organization



The Annual Publication of Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc.

## Furthering the Mission Established by Founder Cynthia Hinckley

### Filling a Void by George Lewis



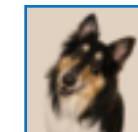
George Lewis and Katie

In February 2020, I was a patient at Cooley-Dickinson Hospital suffering from severe back pain. During my stay, I was fortunate to be visited by a therapy dog team from Bright Spot Therapy Dogs (BSTD). Their visit was about the only positive recollection I have from my hospitalization and subsequent two week stay in a rehabilitation facility. I had never heard of Bright Spot; I didn't even know the meaning of the term "therapy dog."

However, I was intrigued. I asked the dog's handler a barrage of questions about the BSTD organization, opportunities, training requirements, her dog, etc. I'm certain she couldn't wait to get out of my room. I really gave her a grilling.

The back story is that in 2020, I had been fully retired for two years and was having trouble adjusting to retirement. Due to my deteriorating physical condition, I was unable to pursue activities I had always enjoyed. Furthermore, I had not identified a volunteer opportunity that appealed to me; so there I was with plenty of time, dead time. Actually, it's not an

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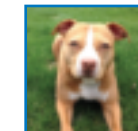
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#### MISSION STATEMENT

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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Dear Friends,

Eighteen years after founding Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Cynthia Hinckley retired as Executive Director on December 31, 2022. Bright Spot has grown from serving 5 facilities to serving over 300, and has trained more than 750 therapy dog teams under Cynthia's spirited and steady leadership. As Founder and Executive Director, Cynthia touched the lives of thousands of people, and her unparalleled commitment to the power of the human-canine bond enabled Bright Spot to flourish, even weathering a global pandemic.

Along with big shoes to fill, Cynthia leaves behind a strong organization poised for continuous growth. In addition to learning from Cynthia over the six years working alongside her as the Assistant Director of Bright Spot, I am humbled and grateful that I was able to work directly with her over the six months prior to her retirement as she supported my transition into the role of Executive Director.

The continued impact of the pandemic has further necessitated the need for our therapy dog teams and the caring and comfort they provide. We have more public schools, libraries, nursing homes, hospitals, and universities requesting our services. We added four extra courses to our original 2022 schedule to meet the demand for prospective volunteers seeking to enroll in our training courses. In 2022, we trained 96 teams, over 23 percent more than our second highest year, and our 2023 training courses are filling quickly. We have already added two training courses to our original 2023 schedule, and we have added two more trainers and an evaluator to help us meet the demand for our services.

Thanks to IT Coordinator Kevin Russell and Membership Coordinator Patti Tibbetts, we continue to institute improvements to our infrastructure, making it easier to apply and then enroll in our training courses. Together Kevin and Patti have streamlined much of the process, implementing more efficient online systems for tracking applicants and volunteers throughout the certification process, for scheduling team evaluations, and for being better prepared with necessary handler t-shirts, dog vests, and team ID badges.

Bright Spot's unprecedented growth and improvements to our infrastructure are only possible because of our loyal and generous donors.

Our volunteers are the heart of Bright Spot. They selflessly share their wonderful dogs with others, embracing Bright Spot's mission. This year's *Bright Spot News* features stories from a variety of volunteers. Among others, you will meet a retiree looking for a purpose, a school librarian and her scruffy rescue dog who inspired an entire school district, and a husband and wife who continue to give to Bright Spot as a way to honor their deceased therapy dog's legacy.

Although Bright Spot has a new post office box and a new Executive Director, we remain committed to the mission established by Founder Cynthia Hinckley more than eighteen years ago: *To provide comfort and caring through the human-canine bond.*

Warmest regards,

*Michelle T. Karb*

Michelle T. Karb  
Executive Director

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exaggeration to say, "I was bored out of my mind." I needed to find something constructive to fill the void I was experiencing.

Once home from the hospital and rehab, one of the first things I did was Google the BSTD website. I couldn't get thoughts of therapy dog training out of my mind. Was this the outlet (purpose) I needed? Surely my dog, Katie, was an excellent candidate. After all, she had taken two levels of obedience classes and she was friendly, medium size, non-shedding and of course, VERY CUTE. On the flip side, she had always been skittish in unfamiliar settings. How would she acclimate to new people, new places, distracting noises, etc.? These were legitimate concerns. After considerable hemming and hawing, I attempted to register for therapy training classes.

Unfortunately, the timing was terrible due to the COVID pandemic. BSTD training classes were suspended. We would need to wait... and wait. I checked on the status regularly. Finally, in the fall of 2021, we were able to register for the first post-lockdown class. In preparation, I made a point to take Katie with me everywhere dogs were welcome.

After some initial shyness in class, Katie became more comfortable and performed well. We passed our evaluation and began exploring possible visitation sites. We interviewed at two very different facilities and almost immediately began making weekly visits at each: Mercy Medical Center (MMC), Springfield, Massachusetts and Riverside Industries (RSI), Easthampton, Massachusetts.

On Mondays, at MMC, we visit patients, medical staff, support staff, and visitors. Katie brings smiles to faces. For our brief interaction, physical issues, stress, anxiety, depression, etc. for patients and staff are pushed aside. Katie becomes the focus – a pleasant distraction. More appropriately, a "BRIGHT SPOT" during otherwise challenging circumstances. With that in mind, I distribute colorful 3" x 5" cards with Katie's picture and a note from her on one side and Bright Spot Therapy Dog information on the other



Katie's Card

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### In Memory of Special Pets

- Andrew Bowersox  
*In memory of Kashmir, Claire, Duncan and Chet*
- Janice and Richard Brigham  
*In memory of Toby and Blue*
- Norma and Daniel Coogan  
*In memory of Jake*
- Wayne and Cindy Desroches  
*In memory of Max and Milo*
- Anita Ducharme  
*In memory of Logan*
- Adele Gladstone-Gilbert  
*In memory of Sirius*
- Diane Gould  
*In memory of Trevor*
- Janet Gracia  
*In memory of Ava*
- Laurie Hager  
*In memory of Rowan*
- Kristen and Mike Hinckley  
*In memory of BB*
- Peter and Anita Hinckley  
*In memory of BB, Buddy and PJ*
- Diane Houston  
*In memory of Rowan*
- Michelle Karb  
*In memory of Rowan*
- Judith Kelly  
*In memory of Monroe*
- Paula Lipkin  
*In memory of Rowan*
- David and Dollinda Lund  
*In memory of Maxwell*
- Harry Mills  
*In memory of Bella*
- Kathy Osborne  
*In memory of Dehli and Kaezli*
- Nancy Pearce  
*In memory of Rowan*
- Tom and Linda Pickreign  
*In memory of George*
- Tonya and Richard Plumb  
*In memory of Cheeka*
- Ron and Linda Rancourt  
*In memory of Mekko and Nikki*
- Brian and Sheila Schick  
*In memory of Clementine*

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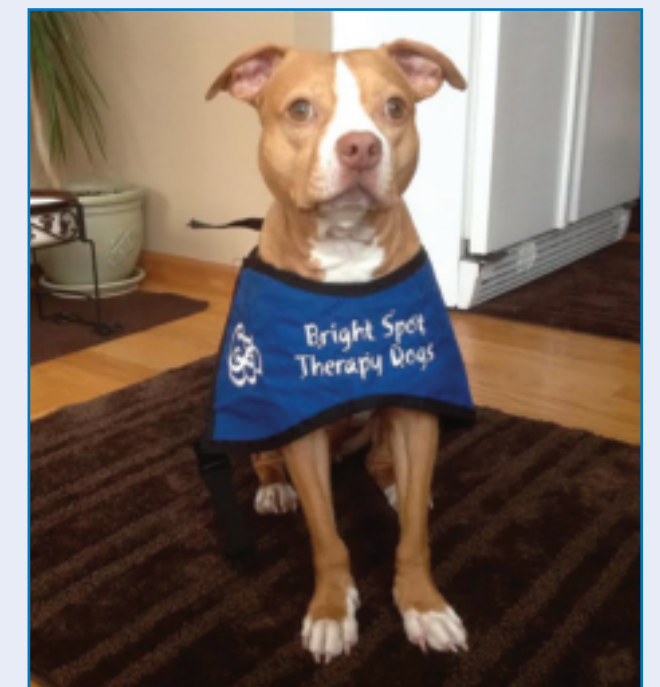
**Gift in Kind**  
Fiona and Kevin Russell, Right Angle, Inc.

### Why We Give by Tonya Plumb

When Lili came into my life, a sad and emaciated puppy, I had no idea where our journey would lead. Despite her odds, Lili flourished and without a doubt, will forever be the love of my life.

Lili was incredibly endearing with a very sweet demeanor. Everyone loved her, so I thought, "Why not share her heart?" We took the training required for us to represent Bright Spot Therapy Dogs. The happiness Lili brought to the elderly residents at our local nursing home was simply amazing. I would peek into a room first to find someone sitting there looking lonely and sad. When Lili walked in, it was like the sun came out. As a Reading Buddy, she excelled. The kids in our group eagerly looked forward to reading to her every week. Lili brought so much joy to so many during her time in this program.

Sadly, Lili passed away on August 18, 2020. To honor her life, my husband and I donate generously to Bright Spot Therapy Dogs to pay forward her participation, as well as to acknowledge the beautiful work and difference all of these wonderful dogs continue to make in the lives of those who need them. 🐾



*Donations reported here run from January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022. All donations received after December 31, 2022 will be reported in the 2024 issue of Bright Spot News.*

**Friends of Bright Spot *continued***

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- United Way of Franklin and Hampshire Region
- Wesleyan University
- Western New England University
- Wilbraham Rotary Memorial Foundation, Inc.
- Rebecca Wong and Dave Nitka

**In Honor of Special People**

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- Andrea Goldstein  
*In honor of Andrea Brinnel*
- Dorita Henderson  
*In honor of Andrea Brinnel*
- Al and Cynthia Hinckley  
*In honor of Rita Stanisiewski*
- Cynthia Hinckley  
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- Margie Hinckley  
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- Diane Houston  
*In honor of Cynthia Hinckley*
- Diane Houston  
*In honor of Fay Zipkowitz and Molly*
- Michelle Karb  
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- Michelle Karb  
*In honor of Sharon Dolloff and Maxwell*
- Michelle and Rick Karb  
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- Reva Kleppel  
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- Liza Pulsifer  
*In honor of Amy Carol*
- Ellen Smithline  
*In honor of Andrea Brinnel*
- Robert and Nick Stern  
*In honor of Diane Houston*

**In Honor of Special People *continued***

- Abigail Thomsen  
*In honor of Andrea Brinnel*
- Alycia Trakas  
*In honor of Andrea Brinnel*
- Fay Zipkowitz  
*In honor of Diane Houston and The Poodles*

**In Honor of Special Pets**

- Kathy Desmond  
*In honor of Logan*
- Jacob Edwards  
*In honor of All the Good Dogs*
- Diane and Doug Gnepp  
*In honor of Picalina*
- Teresa Knox  
*In honor of Zangao and Lali*
- JA and Megan Marshall  
*In honor of Cadence*
- Pat Montimurro  
*In honor of The Karb Gang*
- Mary Paprocki  
*In honor of Lucky*

**In Memory of Special People**

- Christine Anderson  
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*In memory of Colin Little, Jr.*
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*In memory of Caitlin Clavette*
- English Setter Association of America  
*In memory of ESAA members who passed in 2022*
- Diane and Doug Gnepp  
*In memory of Jake Sharfstein*
- Janice James  
*In memory of Gay Goodwin*
- Susan Lak  
*In memory of Henry and Evelyn Lak*
- Judy Moore  
*In memory of Betty White*
- Sandy Powers  
*In memory of Jay McMahan*
- Linda Riley  
*In memory of Gay Goodwin*
- Nancy Rule  
*In memory of Roy E. Rule*

**Countess Basie Brings Comfort  
by Andrea Brinnel**

**M**y tri-color rough collie, Countess Basie, and I have been a Bright Spot team since December of 2019. Basie is the second collie with whom I trained to be a therapy team and the first one affiliated with Bright Spot Therapy Dogs.

Pre-pandemic I was working full-time for the Connecticut State Department of Education, and Basie and I made monthly visits to Bradley International Airport as part of the Bradley Buddies Program. We also made occasional visits to Ruth's House Assisted Living and the Leavitt Family Jewish Home. During the pandemic, we could not go into Ruth's House or the Jewish Home, so we had to get creative. Basie put on her tutu and fairy wings, and we walked around outside the buildings. The ground floor residents got a real kick out of seeing us, and we could see that this little act of kindness put a big smile on their faces.

Fast forward a few years... I am now retired, and Basie and I visit Ruth's House and the Leavitt Family Jewish Home on alternating weeks with occasional visits to Bradley Airport. As an adjunct Professor at Bay Path University, I was asked to bring Basie along when I engaged in coaching for the Massachusetts teachers' test (Basie even had her own contract with the University). We have also visited the students at Bay Path during finals week, and we plan to continue to visit during midterms and finals. During the pandemic, we tried some virtual visits with students, but Basie found the whole Zoom thing underwhelming and I think more than a little confusing. We're so happy to be back in person!

Of all our visits, Basie and I have formed some extra special relationships with some of the residents at Ruth's House. When

we arrive on Wednesday mornings, the Basie fan club is waiting for us in the foyer. In October, on Basie's 8th birthday, we had a party for her at the residents' request - party hats, singing Happy Birthday, and donuts for everyone! Not surprisingly, everyone knows Basie's name while I'm known as "the lady that brings Basie". The fact

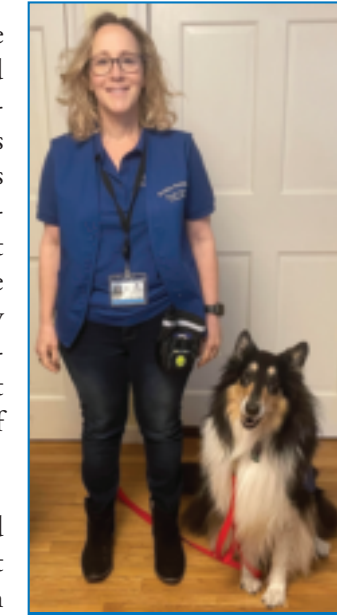
that Basie is a rough collie is pretty neat too, as many of the people we visit grew up with Lassie in their lives; they watched the television show and everyone either had, or knew someone who had a collie. There is always a story about the collie their family had, the collie down the street that walked with all the kids to school, or the heroic collie that Lassie could have turned to for advice.

Basie and I love all the visits we make and can see how much the people benefit from spending time with us. They love to hug, brush, pet, and give Basie treats, and I have gotten to meet some incredibly interesting people like one resident who speaks five languages, and another who loves doo wop and the Yankees. Sitting with residents and listening to their stories while they interact with Basie and me has been a valuable way for me to allocate my time as a retiree.

On Wednesday morning when I have on my Bright Spot shirt and get out Basie's blue Bright Spot vest,

she literally dances around the kitchen because she is so excited to "go to work"! I have even created Basie trading cards (similar to the Bradley Buddies trading cards) for our visits. I'm pretty sure that Basie cards are tucked into many mirrors at Ruth's House, the Leavitt Jewish Home, and at Bay Path.

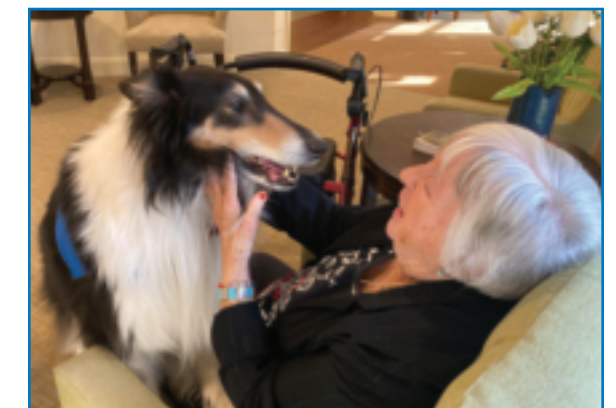
I am always proud when people ask about what Bright Spot is and how to become a therapy dog team. Bright Spot handouts and cards are always in my backpack! 🐾



**Andrea Brinnel and Countess Basie prepare to visit Bradley**



**Countess Basie providing comfort**



**Countess Basie bringing joy**

## A Scruffy Dog with an Underbite

by Jennie Lund

My phone buzzed with a text message. Waiting on the screen was a picture of a scruffy dog with teeth that stuck out from beneath his mustache. His coat needed a good brushing and his teeth desperately needed braces. What struck me were his brown eyes. They were pleading, pulling me in. His name read Teddy, which seemed fitting because all I wanted to do was squeeze him tightly. I knew he had to be my dog.

The rescue organization responded to my inquiry quickly and provided me with the meager information they had. Teddy was an adult; his medical history was unknown and he had been with them for two months. He was in Kentucky and could be transported to Connecticut the following week. We later learned that Teddy had been scheduled for euthanasia. We paid the adoption fee and arranged to meet the transport on April 26, 2018.

Teddy quickly fell into the rhythm of our household. He followed me everywhere and sat beside me. No matter the mundane chore, Teddy was with me, willing me to finish quickly so I could snuggle him. It was a Sunday afternoon and Teddy had been following me around our yard when he slumped onto his side and had a seizure. He was brought to the vet where he was prescribed medication. Unfortunately, a side effect of the medication is the urge to eat strange things. Teddy ate a stuffed animal and required surgery. Teddy developed Colitis afterward, resulting in the need for additional medications.

A year after his surgery, Teddy hurt his back by jumping onto the couch. Knowing something was terribly wrong, I carried Teddy to the car and again brought him to the emergency vet. Teddy remained on his side, panting and whining. The veterinarian evaluated Teddy and told me that the best course of action was to euthanize him. He said it was the humane thing to do. I asked the veterinarian to give me a moment with Teddy. I called my regular vet. He told me to get Teddy to his clinic, even though it was the weekend.

I paid my bill and exited with Teddy in my arms. Dr. Matt assessed Teddy and confirmed that he had hurt his back, but said Teddy was not in dire condition. He prescribed medicines to make him comfortable and we had to wait and see. By the next day, Teddy was able to stand again and walk slowly. By the end of the week, Teddy was running, happy to be back to his old self.



Jennie Lund and Teddy

Teddy continues to have health issues as a result of his Colitis. He has flare-ups, where he won't eat for a period of time due to an upset stomach, but through it all, Dr. Matt monitors him closely. We owe Teddy's life to Dr. Matt, as he was unwilling to give up on him.

Despite Teddy's health issues, one thing has remained constant... his love for people. Teddy has been poked, prodded, taken hundreds of pills, but never once has his spirit wavered. He greets whoever comes to visit, lays beside our guests, and asks to be pet. Teddy just loves his human friends and wants nothing more than to show them love.

Bright Spot Therapy Dogs came to my attention years ago, but I paid no heed to the organization because I never thought I would have the skills to train a dog to do the important work of therapy dogs. The only "training" I had been successful at is getting a dog to sit and go potty outside. It was not until I started my new position as a K-12 school librarian in Vermont that I began considering therapy dog work. After much deliberation, I decided to enroll in a therapy dog training class offered through Bright Spot Therapy Dogs. I am so glad I did!



Teddy providing comfort

After many hours of work, as Teddy tends to be stubborn, Teddy and I successfully passed the therapy dog evaluation in July and Teddy began his Bright Spot Therapy Dog career in August. At first, I planned on having Teddy attend school once a week, but it immediately became obvious that Teddy was needed much more.

Students of all ages flock to the library to spend time with Teddy. When students enter, their first words are always, "Is Teddy here?" Students

# Thank You to Our Donors

## 2022 Annual Report of Giving

We extend our deepest appreciation to our donors, foundations, and sponsors. Your generous support enables us to continue providing comfort and caring 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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- Anonymous
- Kevin and Susan Lawson
- Bryan and Leslie Lorber
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## Canine in the Conference Room

by Megan Kelty

A year and a half ago, I began a new job in a middle school. I was delighted by the professional opportunity, but also nervous about joining a new district, staff, and community of students while COVID restrictions remained in place. In addition, this was my first education position in grade levels beyond elementary school. On my first day at the school, I approached the building feeling like a new student, complete with butterflies and sweaty palms. Before walking awkwardly into the foyer, I took a deep breath. I entered the office, where I was due to attend a meeting, and was greeted by several colleagues and a dog. A dog! I was not expecting a canine in the conference room.

home, things were hard. I was going through a divorce but was not ready to share this news at work. On the days Betty was at school, I made a point to find her on my short breaks. Something about Betty made everything feel right in the world. When she looked at me with her dark brown eyes with her droopy tongue and dog smile, my troubles seemed to slip away. She began to recognize me and her tail would wag quickly whenever she saw me approach. I would sit with her, give her belly rubs, and observe her quirks, especially her signature move: The Betty Paw (an indication that Betty requests attention). Sometimes she would place her head on my lap. I often spoke to Betty, as people talk to dogs, knowing that they will not answer with words, but knowing nonetheless they understand us. Betty sensed that I needed her during those months. And she gave me so much dog love.

As I compose this article a year later, I am more settled at home and at work. I have moved into a new home and my family members and I are adjusting. At work I feel more confident with each passing week. I continue to seek out Betty often, to pause for a few moments on hectic days, to give her belly and chin rubs. Betty's gentle, calm presence has provided me with peace and solace during two significant life transitions. I feel there is a reason Betty came into my life when she did and I credit her with supporting me during a tough life phase. Without Betty, the days would have been longer and harder. I have no doubt.

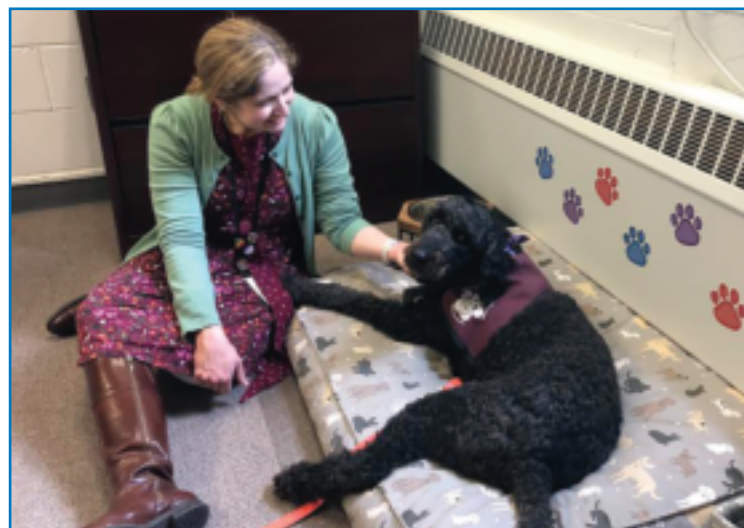
I can now express with certainty my love for Betty, like so many others who know her. She spreads joy and comfort throughout the school community, without bias, to anyone who needs her, no matter their age. Betty was there for me, and she will be there for you, too. Thank you, Betty. You have been a true Bright Spot for me. 🐾



Megan Kelty and Betty pose for a photo

"Meet Betty," I was told by the principal, "our school's therapy dog." Betty approached me and gently placed her head against my leg. I began to pet her. The principal answered my questions, defined the role of a school therapy dog and explained the training required for Bright Spot Therapy Dog certification. As I stroked Betty's curls and listened to the principal, I became entirely at ease. Betty had calmed my nerves and supported me during my first day at a new job. When I went home that day and told my family members about my new position, Betty was the first detail I shared.

As the months passed, I became more familiar with my masked colleagues and students. I grew accustomed to the routines of the school and to the constantly changing COVID guidelines. But at



Megan and Betty share a moment

can usually find Teddy on the couch or near the window, waiting for his visitors to arrive. At the start of the school year, one boy needed to take breaks every hour and would visit Teddy in order to stay regulated. Now, this young man is able to remain in class with minimal breaks, which has been attributed to his "Teddy time." Students enjoy reading with Teddy, as he is a nonjudgmental listener, helping students gain confidence.

One middle school boy struggles with appropriate social interactions, so during daily Book Club, he has been choosing Teddy as his partner for book discussions. While with Teddy, he practices using appropriate language and has been able to share his thinking in a more respectful manner. Students also take Teddy out for recess providing children who might not have one, a playmate.

Teddy not only supports students, but staff, as well. Teaching is a challenging profession and adults also need moments to take deep breaths and receive love from a dog. Many staff members come to the library for a five-minute break to sit on the floor and pet him. Others ask if they can take him out for a walk around the building. Our school administrators pass through the library to sneak in quick moments with Teddy. Teddy's impact was recognized at a schoolwide assembly this fall and now twelve others in my district are working toward becoming members of Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, hoping to share their dogs with students, families, and staff members in their respective schools.

I'm grateful for the text I received that day with a photo of the scruffy dog with the underbite. Teddy's love has changed my life in so many ways and now, because of Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Teddy gets to spread his love to Vermont students and staff. Each day, when I enter the doors to my school, I hear teachers and students alike say, "Oh good. It's a Teddy Day!" 🐾



Teddy providing comfort

## Filling a Void

by George Lewis

Continued from page 2

side. I've been told these are cheerful reminders of our visits. It's been gratifying to know they are appreciated.

On Wednesday afternoons, we visit RSI. This is a non-profit organization which provides day services to individuals with a wide spectrum of intellectual, physical, and emotional challenges. Most clients are faced with multiple impairments which benefit from the highly individualized programs and care provided by RSI.

Initially, some clients ignored Katie, others recoiled away from her. I'm pleased to report that now virtually everyone looks forward to her visits and enjoys interacting with her. The feelings are mutual. I know it sounds anthropomorphic, but I do believe Katie is aware of and sensitive to each individual's special circumstances. She appears to be oblivious to having an ear pulled or getting poked in her eye. She seems to know these are attempts to pet her.



George and Katie visit with a UMass student

I can't speak of RSI without expressing my admiration for the entire staff. I marvel at their dedication, focus, empathy, and patience. These professionals really "walk the walk." I'm impressed every time we visit.

In the past year, Katie and I have also participated in several college stress relief events and thoroughly enjoyed them all. The opportunity for students to meet and interact with a number of wonderful dogs and their handlers provides a welcome respite from the anxiety induced by final exams and assignment deadlines. I have left each event thinking, "Where were events like this when I was in school?" I sure could have benefited.

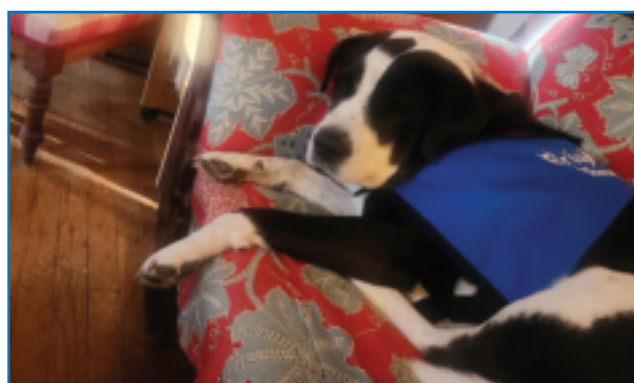
I could never have imagined that a brief visit by a BSTD team, while I was hospitalized, would be the impetus for Katie and me to pursue what has become an important facet of our lives. We look forward to our visitations every Monday and Wednesday. I'm certain meeting Katie is a "BRIGHT SPOT" in the day for everyone we visit. Sharing her with others has filled a void in my life for which I am most grateful. Thank you BSTD. 🐾

## Spotlight on New Teams



Christine Apostol and Gabe

Gabe is a five-year-old schnoodle from Alabama. He attends school with me at the Melican Middle School, Northborough, MA on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On our morning drive, Gabe wears his vest proudly and once we make the turn into the parking lot, he stands up and knows he's at school. He helps students by going on walks, sitting on their laps, doing tricks, and licking their faces. His favorite part of his day is greeting students as they come to school or transition between classes. He supports students in our therapeutic programs, special needs programs, as well as in my classroom. Students and staff have enjoyed Gabe's playful energy and look forward to days he comes to school. 🐾



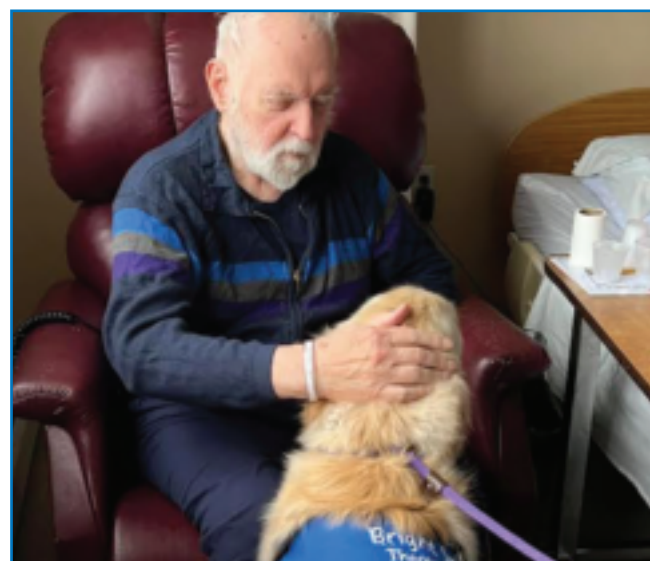
Angela Moll and Bruno

VNA Hospice of Worcester, MA has a new volunteer - Bruno! He's a rescue from Sterling Shelter who brings his calming nature to patients throughout Central MA, from Rose Monahan Hospice House to patients' houses, like here at a home in Northborough. Bruno's relaxed personality is a great joy for his patients, who play with and "treat" him very kindly. Sometimes you just need a canine friend! 🐾



Gabrielle Vitiello and Lena

Lena has been enjoying practice sessions on Smith College campus in Northampton, MA where students brighten in her presence. Lena has a knack for finding people who need her most. She will approach with a gentle wag of her whole body and do her best to contain her joy and affection. We are excited to start Reading Buddies at the Westhampton and Ashfield libraries. Our plan also includes visits to senior centers and local schools. 🐾

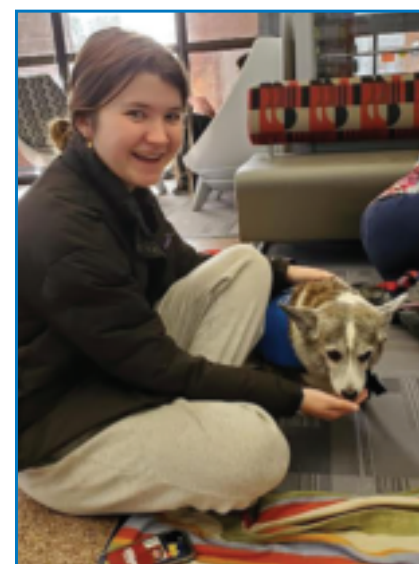


James Thebarger and Quinn

Quinn jumped right into his new role as a Bright Spot Therapy Dog and has been visiting Valerie Manor in Torrington, CT, a local nursing home, as well as the Charlotte Hungerford Hospital, a local community hospital in Litchfield County Connecticut. Drenched in enthusiasm and with a smile to match, Quinn brightens everyone's day and mood. Along with his love for people, Quinn really enjoys riding in the elevator. 🐾

## UMass Paws Events Enter 10<sup>th</sup> Year

By April McNally, Center for Health Promotion, University of Massachusetts Amherst



Bright Spot Henrietta

I am so grateful for the collaboration the University of Massachusetts Amherst has with Bright Spot Therapy Dogs. It seems fitting that our first Paws event was held in February 2014 (aka February '14). The students who come to the events talk about how much they love the dogs and wish they could be on campus all the time. It is amazing to see how deeply the human/canine connection runs. It is palpable at each event.

The goals for our Paws events are to reduce student stress, as well as provide opportunities for students to engage in self-care. Self-care can mean many things, so we try to offer a variety of opportunities for them to connect not only visiting the dogs, but also engaging with the handlers, staying in the present moment, talking with friends and/or someone they've never met before, taking some deep breaths, receiving acupuncture, or stopping by an activity table to connect with the Peer Health Educators (PHEs).

We believe in a peer-to-peer model, so to see student leaders connect with their peers to welcome them to the events, engage with them through various activities, and share resources that support student wellbeing is wonderful. Students often enter the event stressed, and after spending time with the dogs, they are relaxed and sometimes more open to discuss how they are doing with a peer.

While we had to cancel a few events due to the pandemic, we collectively decided to get creative in Spring 2021 and worked together to offer two virtual Paws events. Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, UMass Libraries, and PHEs put their heads together to design a wonderful way to provide some level of consistency and familiarity during an incredibly stressful and isolating time.

Looking at the data, approximately one hundred PHEs welcomed over 36,000 students to the Paws events over the past nine years. It is wonderful to see the reach that this program has with students. The volunteers at Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, both canine and human, have been incredible to work with over the years. Their dedication to students is heartwarming. Many students have reported year after year that this is their favorite event on campus.

Here are some of the many powerful comments from students:

- "I got to know some of the dog rescue stories, and it felt good knowing about good deeds by other people."
- "Had two midterms today, definitely made it all better. The whole vibe changes once you enter the event."
- "Why haven't we been doing this forever?"
- "My heart is full."
- "Got dog kisses and felt loved."
- "For the first time in a while I was happy."
- "Loved this event! I have missed my dog a lot lately so this was awesome to have! Thank you so much."
- "This was the highlight of my semester."
- "I love dog day! My favorite days!"
- "That was perfect."
- "This is the best thing UMass has ever done for its students."
- "I really enjoyed and it relieved not only my stress but also my family's." (Virtual event)
- "Love when the dogs come, brightens my day."
- "Both my dogs died last month and it's nice seeing happy dogs again."
- "This is the highlight of my entire semester."
- "It's so nice that dogs can come to UMass :)"
- "I look forward to the therapy dogs each semester."
- "I wish these dogs were here every day!"

As we head into the 10<sup>th</sup> year of this wonderful collaboration, it will be exciting to see how many tails are wagging, tricks are attempted for treats, belly rubs are received, and covert dog kisses are stolen. Equally exciting will be seeing all the smiling faces among students, shrieks of happiness, and countless exclamations of "Aww!" 🐾



Bright Spot Peanut



Bright Spot Bear