

Olympic Pet Pals connect with therapy dogs

Organization provides spay-neuter services

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Since the start of the 21st Century, Olympic Mountain Pet Pals has been extending a helping hand to low-income pet owners, but in the nearly two decades since, they've also branched out into connecting both retired seniors and budding young readers with loyal, affectionate animal buddies.

Pat Swain, a board member for OMPP, recalled its origins in 2001 as a non-profit to provide funds for spaying and neutering services to low-income families who own pets.

Swain reported that OMPP has helped spay and neuter 5,151 house pets, as well as 2,314 feral and abandoned cats, in the subsequent 17 years. It also has provided low-income pet-owning households with emergency services for veterinarian bills through Ginger's Fund.

Swain said OMPP began as an offshoot of Jefferson County Animal Services, when its board members saw the need to address the problem of cat and dog overpopulation in Jefferson County.

"A program to provide financial assistance for low-income households' cats and dogs, and a trap-neuter

program for feral cats were established with the assistance and guidance of several local veterinarians," Swain said. "These programs enable our local shelter to have a live-release rate of 96 percent."

The organization changed its name to Olympic Mountain Pet Pals in 2004 in order to distinguish it from the animal shelter operation.

OMPP also runs two outreach programs: Pets to People, which sends pets to visit seniors at facilities such as the Life Care Center, Avamere and Victoria Place to help brighten their days; and Read to Rover, which allows students at Chimacum Creek Primary, Salish Coast Elementary and the Quilcene School District to read to dogs.

Marsha Wiener started Pets to People by taking therapy dogs into assisted-living homes.

"It brings joy to the residents to interact with dogs," Swain said, adding that roughly half a dozen teams of dogs and handlers serve the three aforementioned assisted-living centers. "We often get to hear stories about the dogs the residents used to own. They love reminiscing, and it was those dogs they were petting at the moment that brought such memories back to them."

Kate Schumann started Read to Rover, first at the Port Townsend Public Library, then at Grant Street Elementary.

"She was inspired by her

own love of literacy, and her exposure to literature, to use therapy dogs to help young readers," Swain said. "We expanded to Chimacum Creek Primary in 2009 and included the Quilcene schools in 2015."

Chimacum Creek Primary is currently served by 16 teams of Read to Rover dogs and handlers, serving a total of 64 students each week.

"Each of them makes a commitment to be there for their 'forever kids' every week," Swain said. "We're still waiting for the go-ahead to start at Salish Coast Elementary, which used to be Grant Street Elementary, but there are 11 therapy-dog teams ready to begin again in the new school, as soon as they are ready for us."

Swain said OMPP is a volunteer-run organization with no office and little overhead.

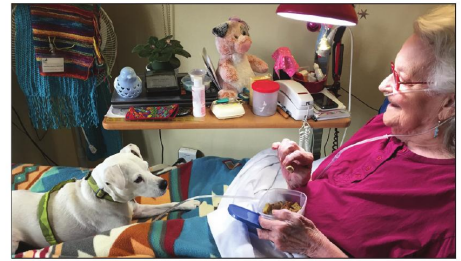
"One person handles the low-income spay/neuter program," Swain said. "Another one handles the feral/community cat program, to trap, neuter and return them. Our hours vary, depending on the number of applications and calls for each service, but our veterinary expenses run about \$35,000 per year. Fortunately, the only expense for the therapy-dog programs is for liability insurance."

Swain deemed OMPP's greatest need as financial donations to pay for veterinary services.

"The community can support us by donating as generously as they can, and by urging people to

spay and neuter their pets, as well as publicizing our own spay-and-neuter programs throughout Jefferson County," Swain said. "We believe that our programs are of great importance to the community and hope to be able to continue them. With sufficient funds, and, hopefully, more volunteer and board members, we will be able to do that."

For more information, visit ompets.org.



Residents of assisted living homes receive animal companionship through Pets to People. Courtesy photo

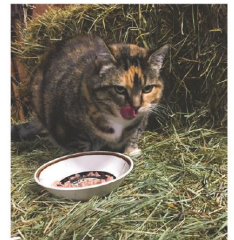


Olympic Mountain Pet Pals, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, is dedicated to the goal of eliminating the number of homeless animals in Jefferson County. Our programs address this need by funding spay/neuter of feral and abandoned cats, as well as dogs and cats of low-income families who lack the resources to spay or neuter their pets.



Pets to People visit to Life Care Center

Olympic Mountain Pet Pals also has two outreach programs, Pets to People and Read to Rover. Pets to People therapy dog teams visit seniors in local assisted living homes.



Spayed and Happy Barn Cat



Listening to Reader at Chimacum Creek School Read to Rover

Read to Rover dogs serve students at local elementary schools, helping them learn to read in a safe and fun environment.

For more information about using our services or how you can help, go to ompets.org.

St. Vincent: 'Power Boost'

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going now, by Wednesday, we have pretty much used all the money we have to spend for that week."

If a special need arises, "we have other people in the faith community to help us put together a larger package for emergencies," Cantlon said.

REACHING OUT FOR HELP

When a family or individual is in need, the first step is to contact the nonprofit at 360-379-1325 to begin the process of receiving aid.

"Basically, the way we structure what we do is we give out as much as \$200 for an individual every six months, as much as \$300 for a family every six months, or as much as \$400 for a family of five or more every six months."

The cap in the award is to ensure there is enough funding to help others in need.

"We have more applicants than we have funds," said Laurie Meyer, a member of the St. Mary Star of the Sea Conference. "The grant will be used to provide additional funding for temporary and emergency assistance for basic human needs in our community — specifically housing and utilities. The grant will provide funding to assist at least 29 more individuals and families during the upcoming months to avoid shut-off."

The money provided through the nonprofit is supplemental to other aid programs operated by Jefferson PUD and OlyCAP.

receive a shutoff notice with up to \$500.

The Power Boost program distributed almost \$30,000 in aid in 2017, the PUD website states.

"As you know, the PUD allows people to round up or just pay more every month," Cantlon said. "Then they put that into their Power Boost program. At the end of every month, they take the money that they get, and they divide it in half and give half to us and half to OlyCAP. That money is dedicated for use to help people with utilities."

Serving their spiritual brothers and sisters "We believe we are called to help our brothers and our sisters, and that it is really our responsibility to help everyone who needs help," Cantlon said. "Most of the people in the faith-based community all read the same book, and in that book, Jesus Christ, over and over and over again, tells us it is our responsibility to help people in need. And so, we try to live up to that just like every other faith-based group in Jefferson County."

The St. Mary Star of the Sea Conference was established in 1996 and is part of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's Archdiocesan Council of Seattle. One of the largest charitable organizations in the world, it is an international, nonprofit, Catholic lay organization of about 800,000.

Nationally, the society offers a variety of programs and services, including home visits, housing assistance, disaster relief, education

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