

interactions

CELEBRATING COMPANION ANIMALS AND THE WAYS THEY ENRICH OUR LIVES

SPRINGFIELD

ANIMALS and VICTIMS of violence...

helping
people cope
helping
people heal.



interactions

CELEBRATING COMPANION ANIMALS
AND THE WAYS THEY ENRICH OUR LIVES

about Delta

Delta Society® was founded as a non-profit organization in 1977. Our programs and services include the Pet Partners® Program, Animal-Assisted Therapy Services, National Service Dog Center®, and People & Pets which includes *Interactions* magazine.

Delta Society Mission

To promote mutually beneficial relationships between animals and people to help people improve their health, independence and quality of life.

Goals

- Expand awareness of the positive effects animals can have on human health and development.
- Reduce barriers that prevent the involvement of animals in everyday life.
- Expand the therapeutic and service role of animals in human health, service and education.

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contents

5 **feature story**
the link between animal and child abuse:
finding ways to break the family cycle
of violence

by Susan Bernard, MS

8 **pet partners at work**
responding to a crisis
to help a community heal

by Andrea Leigh Piek

11 **service dogs in action**
the sounds of danger:
service dogs alert their owners
to keep them out of harm's way

by Andrea Leigh Piek



on the cover

Pet Partners
helping victims
of violence... see
story page 8.

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departments

4 **editorial**

13 **chairperson's message**

14 **delta news**

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PHOTOS PAGE 2 & 3: PET PARTNERS CAN HELP TO DETRACT OTHER SUFFERERS.
BY JOAN DANA/SEATTLE ©1999



responding to a crisis to help a community heal

BY ANDREA LARON PINK

May 21, 1998

It was just another Thursday for Sandi Arrington, an RN at McKenzie-Willamette Hospital in Springfield, OR. At the end of her work week, she was anticipating her day off and the Memorial Day weekend. Her life partner, Sgt. Mike Wisdom, was on his way to his shift with the Springfield Police Department. His teenage daughter Kirsten was in school. It was a beautiful spring day in the Pacific Northwest; life was good.

Suddenly, everything changed and it became a day like no other this happy family would experience.

The hospital got the emergency call. Shots had been fired in the Thurston High School cafeteria, prepare for incoming wounded.

Mike pulled up to the police station and immediately knew that in this quiet community "something was going down." When he heard it was the high school, his first thoughts were of Kirsten. As one of the officers on duty, he was sent to the school which was now a major crime scene. As Mike made his way through the crowd of anxious parents outside the school, he remembers being asked, "Do you know if my son's all right? What about my Linda?" when he didn't even know if his own daughter was among the victims.

A few minutes later, a call to Mike's pager let him know that Kirsten was one of the lucky ones. When it was all over, two students were dead and more than 20 others were wounded. Kip Kinkel, a student at the school had allegedly snapped, gunning down his fellow students like aliens in a video game. Police would later find his parents dead in their home, also probable victims of Kip's act of violence.

For the "small town" city of Springfield, this violent act was a revelation—it could happen here.

Crisis Response Teams to the Rescue

As the nation's television sets tuned in, various organizations moved in to help the town cope with its trauma. One of those groups was the National Organization for Victim's Assistance (NOVA).

Later that day, at Delta headquarters in the Seattle area, Pet Partners Program Manager Diane Emmons received a call from Lois Hardy, a crisis response coordinator. "Had she heard about the shootings?" With no radio or television at work, she hadn't. NOVA knew of Delta's work with animal-assisted therapy (AAT) and had asked if there were any Pet Partners teams in the area who could help. Diane immediately called Sandi Arrington.

Sandi and her golden retriever Garth had been Pet Partners since 1995, and Diane felt they could do the job.

For Sandi, the call was a much-needed relief from her own shock and grief. The Kinkels were neighbors who lived just a few blocks away; Mrs. Kinkel had been a friend. Kirsten, someone she cared about, had been put at risk. It was overwhelming.

She and Garth met the NOVA team when they landed in Eugene and went with them to the hospital where they worked with a "wonderful cigar-smoking Pastor" to comfort the grieving families in the waiting rooms.

A Pet Partner Responds

Meanwhile, Cindy Ehlers, a Pet Partner in Eugene, OR, heard about the shooting on the radio. Without much thought, she traded her teammate Bear, a kershund, and jumped in her car to make the 15-mile



Pet Partner Teams Sandi Arrington and Garth and Cindy Ehlers and Bear with students at the Memorial Fence that surrounds Thurston High School in Springfield, OR.

trip to Springfield. She had no idea what to expect, or if she was even needed at all, but thought "If they don't want me, I'll just come back home."

To her astonishment, the Red Cross workers on duty welcomed her with open arms and ushered her into the cafeteria. "I felt like a professional; they treated me like a professional," said Cindy. "It was overwhelming. I just wanted to cry. I had this sense of urgency. Bear was a different dog," she continued.

Bear usually puts her Pet Partners skills to work with women at an alcohol and drug treatment center in Eugene, and also with youth groups and teenagers. She is known for her endurance and ability to make people laugh. In Springfield, however, she seemed to understand the gravity of the situation and her demeanor reflected this. Instead of bounding up to someone, she would approach cautiously and nuzzle in a comforting way. "She had an 'old soul' comforting look in her eyes," said Cindy. "It was all done with her eyes."

By Sunday, NOVA had opened the high school as a gathering place for anyone in the community who needed to deal with their emotions following the shooting. Sandi Arrington learned from NOVA team members that in crisis response it is important to get people back to the scene of the incident as soon as possible.

Sandi and Garth were there to help. "There were some students who just wouldn't go into the cafeteria unless Garth was with them," said Sandi. She noted that NOVA had never worked with AAT teams before and were amazed at how much comfort the dog brought to everyone. NOVA staff members benefited from her presence as well, since dealing with people recovering from trauma is often stressful to the response teams.

Getting Back to Normal

On the following Tuesday, Thurston High School was open for learning as usual. However, in recognition of the effect of such a traumatic event on the students, school administrators asked Sandi if she could bring Garth during the school day. Recognizing the magnitude of such a Pet Partners visit, she called Cindy. Together they would spend much of the next week helping the students create a normal atmosphere at the school. Besides students and school staff, they were the only people allowed on-campus that week as it was still considered a crime scene.

School administrators and teachers were so grateful for the dogs' presence that they had the run of the school. Classroom doors were left open. The library and gym became counseling rooms where the dogs could go to students on their own. "We just let them loose," said Sandi. "It was the best thing for the kids."

Bear preferred the library, and even though there was an abundance of tempting stacks, she focused on the kids. Cindy described Bear's technique. "She would go to one person and sit in front of them, staring intently, until she made eye contact. Then she'd stand and rub against them or she'd stay there until they would pet and hug her. Some kids, usually girls, would bury their faces in her fur. She'd stay with them the longest. When she finally pulled away, they were always crying."

Garth, who normally visits at McKenzie-Willamette Hospital and Good Neighbor's Alzheimer's Center in Springfield, took the job of helping kids forget. She staked out the gym, chasing basketballs and clowning. Since Kirsten was a student at the school, many of the kids already knew Garth and reacted to her like an old friend. "She just gave them so much joy," noted Sandi—something that had been lacking for so many of the students that week.

Cindy also brought her then three-and-one-half-month-old catterdog, Sheila, for one visit. Though not an official Pet Partner at the time (she is now registered), she was able to reach some of the students who had not responded to the older two. After all, everybody loves puppies.

Both Sandi and Cindy noted that the girls seemed to need them the most, though the boys reacted in their own way—usually by throwing food to the dogs to get their attention.

Sandi and Cindy also took runs going out to the school gates. A memorial, similar to the one outside the Federal Building site of the Oklahoma bombing, was established on the school's chain link fence. There, community members gathered to share their grief.

Sgt. Mike Wilson comments on the interaction between the people in the community and the dogs. "It was just amazing, and wonderful to watch her (Sandi) and Garth in there. She just ran around bringing people back to reality."

In the Aftermath

Prior to the shooting, Cindy Ehlers had been trying to arrange for her and Bear to visit a local residential treatment facility for troubled teens. The facility had been completely uninterested, saying they had no need for animal-assisted therapy. A week after their work at Thurston, the facility, which had seen reports in the local media, called Cindy requesting Bear. They now visit twice a month and have been making great progress with the residents.

For Sandi Arrington, May 21, 1998, was the beginning of a new Pet Partners career. She understands just how important their presence was in helping the Thurston High families cope with their trauma. The state of Oregon was so impressed with her work that they invited her to take their Crisis Response Team Training, conducted by the Oregon State Department of Justice Crime Victim's Assistance Section.

The state paid tuition and room and board for Sandi and Garth to attend a five-day, 40-hour course developed in response to the Thurston High shootings. A letter describing the course explained the need for such training in this way. "While some communities already have crisis response teams established for natural disasters or for debriefing of first responders, relatively few counties have a crisis response team that is specifically designed to deal with the emotional reac-



tions of people in a community that has suffered a traumatic incident."

After attending the class, Sandi realizes that she was very fortunate to have the background she did when responding to NOVA's request. "I wouldn't recommend other Pet Partners teams to do this kind of crisis response without some training," she said. "I felt capable because I'm an RN, and because of my relationship with Mike and my work with Garth, I don't think this is just for anyone to do." Sandi also noted that "Cindy also has a very special dog and is a strong person. I knew she could handle it."

Sandi and Garth are now on call to respond to similar situations in the region.

Sandi sees crisis response as a new opportunity for Pet Partners teams and encourages those who are interested to find appropriate training (see sidebar, page 12). "This stuff can happen everywhere and it's important for people to get involved in things. But you've got to be prepared," she added.

See sidebar, page 12...

ABOVE & LEFT:

Sandi Arrington and Garth (on right) help promote the Ribbon of Promise effort at a Christmas Parade in Springfield last year. The Ribbon of Promise was started by Springfield fire officials Dennis Murphy and Paul Escalante as a national clearing-house for information about preventing violence among children. Cindy Ehlers and Bear were in a similar parade in Springfield's sister city, Eugene.

SERVICE DOGS IN ACTION

the sounds of danger

service dogs alert their owners to keep them out of harm's way

BY ANDREA LEIGH PEAK

It started out as just another guest lecture for Dr. Paul Ogden, Professor of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education at California State University/Fresno's Department of Communicative Sciences and Disorders, and his service dog Chelsea, a Belgian sheepdog. Dr. Ogden had come to this community college, located in a rough section of Los Angeles, to teach language acquisition.

As Dr. Ogden went on with his lecture, Chelsea relaxed nearby—but with her ears ever alert. Suddenly, she leapt up and ran to Dr. Ogden, jumping on him to let him know that something was urgent. Because of his deafness, Paul did not know that gunshots had sounded in another building less than 500 feet away. Chelsea, however, knew that something was not right and wanted to get him to safety as quickly as possible. Dr. Ogden described her actions as "an exaggeration of alerting to the phone or doorbell ringing...I knew it was urgent by her face—and the jumping was so unlike her."

He recounted the incident that happened six years ago as if it were yesterday.

"I signed 'What?'—which is the normal response I always do after she paws me or touches me. Then she leads me to where ever the source of the sound is. But this time I knew I had to pay attention to her. She jumped on me and ran out the classroom door. I ran after her and noticed other students exiting at the same time."

"I thought, 'This is serious.' We had been on the second floor and she took me down the steps; I practically had to run after her. She was leading me in



Dr. Paul Ogden and Chelsea