

PAW PRINTS

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR
HEARTS AND PAWS COMFORT DOGS
TEAM MEMBERS



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In Loving Memory of Brian Hastings



Brian and his wife Mary were founding members of Hearts and Paws Comfort Dogs, serving the community for many years alongside their black lab, Millie. Brian was both a handler and a spotter, and he excelled at both roles with finesse and grace. Additionally, Brian and Mary ran the HPCD gear store for several years. He also served as recording secretary alongside Mary, who took the minutes at meetings.

Brian had a subtle, yet compelling sense of humor. At one evaluation event, he played the part of a “grumpy old man” in a wheelchair, carrying a cane to test the dogs’ comfort with patients. He did such a convincing job that some dogs hesitated slightly until their handlers encouraged them to be gentle and move forward.

But the real Brian was never a grumpy old man. He was always quick to step up and lend a hand whenever it was needed. His humor was contagious, and he had a special talent for putting even the newest members of our organization at ease, whether at a monthly meeting or at one of the many events he, Mary, and Millie attended.

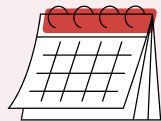
Brian will be greatly missed.

In memoriam contributed by Rebecca and Wesley Blair



Woof Wisdom

A new study published online in August 2026 in the *Journal of Emergency Nursing* found that therapy dog visits were associated with significantly lower perceived stress among emergency department health care workers. The study included 76 staff who had 100 therapy dog interactions averaging just 7.3 minutes each at two emergency departments affiliated with Avera McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.



Next All Member Meeting
Monday, November 16 - 6:30pm
 Dennis Memorial Library
 1020 Old Bass River Rd, Dennis, MA

COMFORT CHRONICLES

FROM THE ALPHA'S DESK

Greetings Hearts & Paws Family,

In a recent email our Co-Vice President Jeff Idels wrote the following, and I could not have said it better:

"Our motto is 'Enriching Lives with Unconditional Love,' and I believe we're really doing that every time we visit. However, after a joyous visit at LIFE (Living Independently Forever), a small community for adults with intellectual disabilities, it struck me that the kids and adults we visit are definitely enriching our lives as well. The thanks we get, and the tremendous outpouring of appreciation is more than I ever expected. It's really something.

The other thought came from a documentary we saw, called the The Blue Zone, an exploration of the world's most extraordinary cultures, where longevity and the quality of life are off the charts. Naturally, the documentary covered the benefits of diet and physical activity, but the finding that stood out for me was that they all possessed a sense of community and a purpose to their lives. Not to get too dramatic, but I feel that Hearts & Paws is providing a fair bit of that for all of us.

The other day, I was on a Zoom call with a group of my high school friends, and it started off all gloom and doom,

with people getting sick, when one of the folks said, 'Doesn't anybody have any uplifting news?' I said 'Let me tell you about Hearts & Paws Comfort Dogs' and it changed the whole tone. I think we're pretty lucky."

-Jeff Idels

Co-Vice President, HPCD

We are indeed very lucky. Lucky to get to do what we do. Lucky to have found a group of folks with various backgrounds who can all come together for the common goal of "Enriching Lives with Unconditional Love." Lucky to meet and form relationships with the people we visit. This organization is truly a gift.

-Amy Usowski

President, HPCD



Board of Directors

-  **President** - Amy Usowski
-  **Vice Presidents** - Rebecca Blair & Jeff Idels
-  **Secretary** - Rose Fiore
-  **Treasurer** - Sue Bernier
-  **Members at Large** - Amy Groden & Anne Thomas
-  **Webmaster** - Donna Martin

● Pup-coming events ●

Annual Member Appreciation Event
 Sunday, November 15th - 1-3 PM
 Town Cove Tap House - Orleans

Harwich Christmas Visit from Santa
 Friday, December 4th - 5-8 PM (including setup)
 Chamber of Commerce - Harwich

Dennis Christmas Stroll
 Sunday, December 13th - 11AM-3PM (including setup)
 Route 6A - Dennis Village



Join the Pack!

Help HPCD spread joy up and down the Cape! Check the latest visitation schedules and Handler/Spotter needs on the **Volunteer Scheduling Pro (VSP)** app.

PAW-TNERS IN ACTION

FEATURED PARTNER: **DOGS ON CALL**

by Adrianna Glazener



CAPE COD
HEALTHCARE



www.capecodhealth.org/patients-visitors/dogs-on-call/

If you're reading this, you already know the joy a calm, friendly dog can bring to a room. HPCD teams who want to take that gift into the hospital setting can join *Dogs on Call*—the official therapy dog program of Cape Cod Health Care, serving Cape Cod and Falmouth Hospitals.

It all began with one volunteer's love for her own dog. Founder and coordinator Leah Hyman spent years volunteering at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York with her greyhound, Ruby, a certified therapy dog. Upon moving to Harwichport to care for her mom, she realized no such group was serving hospitals on Cape Cod. After extensive research into other successful programs around the country, Leah pitched the idea to hospital leadership, and *Dogs on Call* was born.

Dogs on Call (DOC) launched in March 2019, growing from eight to 20 teams within a year. When the pandemic closed hospital doors to volunteers, DOC paused for nearly three years. It relaunched in January 2023 with just three teams, and today it has 27 teams visiting patients and their families between the two hospitals. Leah is quick to point out that the dogs are there for hospital staff as much as patients, since working in healthcare has been especially hard since the pandemic.

It's important to understand that DOC is a hospital program, not a traditional therapy dog organization. Hospital rules are shaped by infection control and other protocols, which DOC prioritizes when recruiting teams from therapy dog organizations with the temperament and training to work within this specialized setting.

Wondering if your dog is a fit? Leah says temperament matters far more than size, age, or breed. Dogs must be calm and easygoing, love attention, get along with other dogs, and know how to sit, lie down, and stay. Equally important is the bond between handler and dog: evaluators want to see a team that is closely attuned, with the leash acting as an extension of the handler's arm.

For Leah, Ruby's legacy lives on through her new love, Penny, a rescue beagle, as well as all the lives touched by *Dogs on Call*. Leah recalls one young woman in the inpatient Behavioral Health program who told her, "I'm so glad I met the dogs today. When I woke up this morning, I didn't want to get out of bed. But now, after the dog visit, I feel I can do anything."

- Created by Leah Hyman in 2019, *Dogs on Call* is the official therapy dog program of CCHC.
- 27 current volunteer handler/dog teams
- Teams commit to 2 visits per month.
- Volunteers who serve without dogs are called "canvassers." They obtain patient consent and ensure spaces are visit-ready.
- Teams sign up to visit general patient rooms, Medical and Radiation Oncology, the ED, hospital lobbies, Behavioral Health, Cuda Women's Center, and/or dementia support groups at the Neuroscience Institute.



FAQs

Can I join Dogs on Call while I'm a Hearts and Paws member?

Yes. Joining *Dogs on Call* (DOC) is your certified therapy dog's pathway to visit Cape Cod and Falmouth Hospitals. DOC is comprised of members from various comfort and therapy dog groups from across the Cape. Handlers continue as usual with their Hearts & Paws visits, and retain their HPCD membership and liability insurance. The two roles complement each other, so you can do comfort dog work with HPCD and hospital visits with DOC to the extent your schedule permits.

Does my dog's Canine Good Citizen (CGC) certification qualify us to join Dogs on Call?

Not on its own. In addition to CGC certification, your dog must also pass a therapy dog evaluation. *Hearts & Paws* does not conduct in-house therapy dog certification, so you will need to be certified by an outside therapy dog organization first, such as Snug Tail Pet Therapy. Contact your HPCD regional coordinator for information on upcoming classes and evaluations, or contact one of the trainers on Page 5 of this newsletter to ask about therapy dog evaluations. Once your dog is a certified therapy dog, you (the human) must apply to become a Cape Cod or Falmouth hospital volunteer.



LET'S
CELEBRATE
THE PEOPLE
BEHIND
THE LEASH



Member Appreciation Dinner
Sunday, November 15th, 1-3 pm
Town Cove Tap House
22A Main Street
Orleans, MA 02653

**SAVE
THE DATE**

*The Hearts and Paws Board wants to celebrate YOU and all YOU do to make our organization as wonderful and successful as it is. We're bringing folks together to share a meal, stories, and fun! RSVP by November 7th. **Humans only, please.***

BEHIND THE LEASH

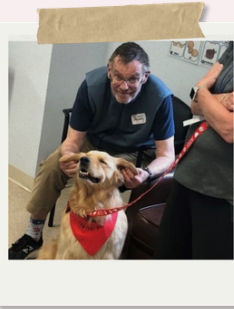
FROM THE ADMINS

The Leash and Good Manners

by Rebecca Blair

Co-Vice President, HPCD

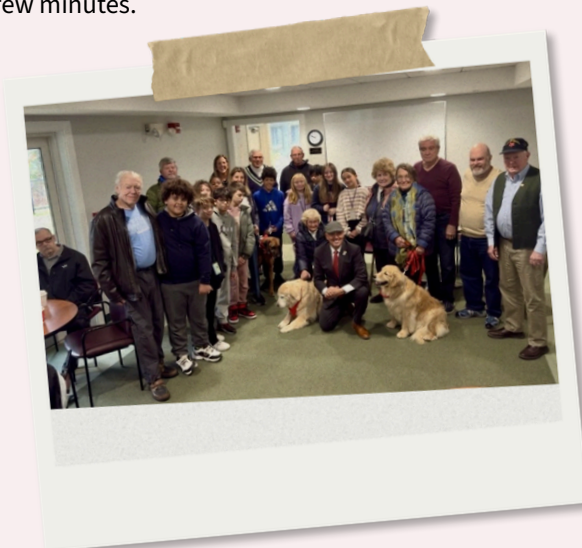
New Member Onboarding/Education Co-Chair



Canine Good Citizen: The Official AKC Guide by Mary R. Burch, Ph.D., is a reliable resource for all of us to use as a reminder of excellent behavior that every well-mannered dog should know. In the book, Dr. Burch shares her expertise about the value of leashes when dogs are in a location where others, particularly humans, may not be comfortable with a dog who appears to be “out of control.”

“As simple as it seems, leashes are the answer to many of the problems related to dogs in our communities. Even if you are an avid dog lover, it can be frightening to be walking in a park and have an unknown dog run up to you. Your heart begins to race and you begin to worry that the dog will bite you or attack your dog (who is on her leash). Even though you are a dog lover, it is probably irritating to hear the owner yelling across the park saying, ‘It’s OK, he’s friendly’ or ‘He’s just trying to say “hello.”’ (p.132-133)

In other words, it doesn’t matter if he’s friendly. The responsible dog owner doesn’t have the right to make you and your dog uncomfortable, as such an encounter creates stress. “If you think that a person walking their dog would like to have the opportunity to meet yours, approach the person and ask permission,” suggests Dr. Burch. It is always best to ensure that the dog owner, whom you may not know, agrees to the opportunity for the two to meet and hopefully enjoy each other and even play for a few minutes.



We welcome your ideas!

Help us improve our newsletter. Do you have feedback, a question to ask our trainer, or a dog, story, or event you'd like to see featured in our next edition? If so, please contact info@heartsandpawscomfortdogs.org.

GOOD DOG TRAINING CORNER

Touch Command

by Amy Groden

Board Member-at-Large, HPCD



If you've met my goldendoodle, Charley Chew, you understand that he has a lot of energy to contain. Sometimes, getting him to focus on a visit requires a reset. In these cases, I've found the "Touch" command to be helpful at getting him refocused in stressful situations.

Teaching your dog the "Touch" command, or asking them to touch the palm of your hand with their nose, is a great tool to use for recall and redirection. According to the [American Kennel Club](#) and guidance from [Smart Dog University](#), you can teach this behavior in a few simple steps:

1. **Present your hand:** Hold your hand out flat in front of you with your palm facing the dog, just a couple of inches away from their nose.
2. **Mark the contact:** The moment your dog's nose, whiskers, or tongue touches your palm, say a marker word like "Yes!" or click a clicker. (If your dog hesitates, rub a smelly treat on your palm or hold a tiny treat between your fingers to encourage them to touch your palm.)
3. **Reward immediately:** Provide a small, high value treat right after the marker word.
4. **Add the verbal cue:** Once your dog reliably touches your palm every time you present it, say the word "Touch" right before you offer your hand.
5. **Vary position and distance:** Slowly move your hand higher, lower, or to the side, add distance, or start practicing in locations with noise or distractions.

When training Charley, I added the verbal "Touch" command on step 2, because he responds very well to verbal signals. You should adapt these instructions to make this fun and successful for your dog's unique personality.

AKC Good Citizen Trainers

Business	Location	Contact Information
Tail Waggin' Dog Training	South Dennis	Heather Garre (508) 736-3202 tailwaggingdogtraining.com
Chatham Dog Club	Chatham	Annie Corrigan (508) 776-5219 Facebook: <i>Chatham Dog Club</i>
MJ Obedience	Bourne	Michael McGrath (508) 759-3647 (508) 250-5551 (cell) www.mjobedience.com
Joseph's Obedience Training	Pocasset	Lori (508) 563-1122 josephsdogtraining.com
Karen Pryor	National	karenpryoracademy.com
Tony Cadogan Snug Tail Pet Therapy	Attleboro	snugpettherapy.org (617) 594-4602

Know someone interested in getting their canine **AKC Canine Good Citizen Certified**? Our current HPCD Trainer Referral List includes only trainers who use "positive reinforcement" methods. Be sure to mention HPCD when signing up!

Visit heartsandpawscomfortdogs.org/resources for additional training information.