

Brooke Grove's Canine Volunteers Offer Comfort, Love and Friendship

Nothing says “home” quite like the presence of a beloved pet that offers companionship, unconditional love and emotional support. In fact, research shows that petting an animal can lower the heart rate and blood pressure while also reducing stress, loneliness, depression and anxiety. In the case of those with Alzheimer’s or other forms of dementia, the calming presence of pets may ultimately assist in a reduction of the need for medications to reduce agitation.

In addition to the live-in pets that can be found on campus, visits from certified therapy dogs have long been a valued part of Brooke Grove Retirement Village’s volunteer services program.

Anna and Flop

When Newfoundlands Anna and Flop come around the corner, reactions to the massive canines encompass everything from joy to disbelief! The companionable duo and their owner, Alesia Harvey, visit residents at Brooke Grove Rehabilitation and Nursing Center (BGRNC) every Thursday, making a special stop to see Ms. Harvey’s mother, resident Diane Lang. Both pups are certified therapy dogs and have earned designation from the American Kennel Club (AKC) as Canine Good Citizens.

Newfoundlands or “Newfies” are known as one of the world’s most powerful dogs. Although they weigh anywhere from 100 to 150 pounds, they are extremely patient, devoted, sweet and intelligent – making Flop and Anna a perfect fit for connecting with seniors and those with Alzheimer’s or other forms of dementia. In addition to volunteering at BGRNC, they work



Anna visits with her “granny,” BGRNC resident Diane Lang

with autistic children and Montgomery County’s Emergency 911 Call Center.

Four-year-old Anna was rescued from a Beijing Slaughterhouse in 2019 and flown to the United States on a Delta Airlines “Freedom Flight.” A great listener, she loves belly rubs but does not want to go hiking or exert too much energy. Her dream job is to work at an ice cream store!

Be sure to pucker up when you meet Flip-Flop, aka Flop. A six-year-old from North Dakota, she is

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Message from the Village

From the desk of Dennis Hunter, president, Brooke Grove Foundation



Almost all of us grew up adoring a pet. Maybe it was a cuddly Akitty, a perky puppy or even a loveable lop-eared rabbit. We also loved to follow the adventures of other animals that spanned our childhoods, from Lassie to Marley.

In the corporate office, we are fortunate to have regular visits from Pepper, who belongs to Director of Human Resources Matt Wetmore. It's rare that even the busiest staff member doesn't take time to give her a pat, smile and speak to her endearingly. She's earned her title of "office therapy dog"! In this issue of Village LIFE, you'll read about a few of the other animals who enrich our lives at Brooke Grove Retirement Village. They provide proof that animal interactions are one of the most powerful and natural ways for people to continue to engage in life.

So, thinking back, what was the name of the pet that listened to your woes, stole your socks, shared your joys and made your life complete? I don't think any of us would trade those times for anything. That's why animals are such an important part of life at Brooke Grove.

Darrel Russell is New EVS Director

On October 18, Brooke Grove Retirement Village (BGRV) welcomed Darrel Russell as environmental services (EVS) director, with responsibilities that include the oversight of all housekeeping and laundry services offered on campus.



Mr. Russell joins BGRV from Healthcare Services Group/Complete Care in Hyattsville, where he served in the same role. His resume includes more than 14 years in EVS leadership positions at skilled nursing facilities and hospitals in the Washington metro area. "Darrel recently lost a couple of employees to BGRV, because of our higher pay rates," noted BGRV Executive Director Patty Gomez. "He believes in encouraging

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Brooke Grove Retirement Village includes:

- The Cottages Independent Living
- The Meadows and The Woods Assisted Living
- Brooke Grove Rehabilitation and Nursing Center

Other divisions of Brooke Grove Foundation:

- Williamsport Retirement Village
- Rest Assured Living Center

Brooke Grove Retirement Village does not discriminate in admissions, employment, contracting with consultants or acceptance of volunteers on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, sexual orientation or national origin.

his employees to grow, and we are pleased that he has chosen to join them here at Brooke Grove!"

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the biggest kisser in social situations. She's also a charmer, having earned AKC's "Star Puppy" recognition at the tender age of 10 weeks old. She has grown into a party girl, who is always looking for a partner in fun things to do.

"Our residents are intrigued by the dogs' enormous size, beautiful fur, and calm and comforting demeanor. They love to hear stories that illustrate their commitment to the community!" said Director of Volunteer Services Barbara Hackett.

Fidos for Freedom

BGRNC residents also look forward to monthly visits from Fidos for Freedom, a nonprofit organization based in Laurel, Maryland. A group of dedicated volunteers and their specially trained therapy, service and hearing dogs, Fidos strives to increase quality of life and provide companionship to people living in the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan community.

The friendly canines provide unconditional love along with proven health benefits associated with interaction with pets – and their members have been volunteering at BGRNC for well over 10 years!

"Typically, there are six to eight dog/handler teams who divide their time between rehab guests and long-term care residents during our visits," explained Fidos member Ziva Schuchman. "We have so many dog lovers here, and they absolutely light up when the Fidos group arrives," added one employee. The staff and family members also experience a sense of well-being from relating to the gentle, well-trained dogs.

If you and your pet would like to "touch people's lives" at Brooke Grove Retirement Village, contact Ms. Hackett at 301-570-7081 or volunteers@bgf.org.



Anna & Flop



Fidos volunteer dogs Bristol, Trista, Tanner, Tommy, Jet, Ziggy and Iko with their owners



Fidos volunteer Fran Glavan (standing) and her sweet dog greet BGRNC resident Sarah Rice.

School Supply Drives are Sweet Success

For the second consecutive year, independent living (IL) residents partnered with neighboring Sharp Street United Methodist Church to collect Back to School supplies for needy kids in the area. “God knew exactly what we needed, and He sent angels like you to help us,” wrote Delicia Moore from the church’s Children’s Ministries program. “Our kids can start their year in great shape with everything they need thanks to all of you!” IL residents also volunteer with the church’s Food Pantry on a regular basis.

In a separate campaign, Brooke Grove Retirement Village’s volunteer services department spearheaded a supply drive for Gaithersburg Elementary School, which serves a large percentage of economically disadvantaged students. “The generosity of our staff, volunteers, residents and visitors in supporting this project means everything to us and the community we serve!” noted Director of Volunteer Services Barbara Hackett.



Volunteer Miles Dinh collects school supplies for the drive sponsored by volunteer services.



Backpacks and other school supplies are packed and ready for delivery to Sharp Street Church by IL volunteers.

Walking the Talk

Director of Volunteer Services Barbara Hackett takes great joy in working with her volunteer team to enrich the lives of residents, rehab guests and staff at Brooke Grove Retirement Village.



But, not everyone knows that she also “walks the talk” by volunteering for other community organizations during her personal time!

Most recently, Ms. Hackett assisted at the front gate and served refreshments at the October 14 Spirits and Steeds festival and fundraiser for the Freedom Hill Horse Rescue in Owings, Maryland. “It was such a rewarding

experience!” she said. “I owned horses when I was younger, and my involvement with Freedom Hill really rekindled my love for them.” Proceeds from the event will be used to meet the needs of the formerly neglected, abused and unwanted horses now in the rescue’s care.



River, a 19-year-old Tennessee Walker gelding, is living out his golden years at Freedom Hill.

Residents Go Undercover at Spy Museum

A recent trip to the International Spy Museum in Washington, D.C., brought independent living residents face to face with spies and spymasters, gadget makers, scientists and engineers from the past and present.

Upon arrival, each person was given an alias and backstory before embarking on an undercover mission that tested their skills through a variety of interactive exhibits. The museum, which includes the largest collection of international espionage artifacts on public display, also highlighted fascinating spy stories from the American Revolution to 21st century cyber warfare. “Today was fun, but I think it taught me that I would

make a terrible spy!” laughed resident Fran Amir.



Residents pose for a picture before assuming their secret identities.

Sherry Weidemeyer Joins IL Leadership Team

Brooke Grove Retirement Village (BGRV) Environmental Services (EVS) Manager Sherry Weidemeyer recently transitioned to Westbrooke Clubhouse, where she assumed the position of Independent Living (IL) Community Services Director on September 25. She replaced Laura Rounds, who retired after 20 years of employment.

Ms. Weidemeyer joined BGRV in 2012, working as Brooke Grove Rehabilitation and Nursing Center’s social services administrative assistant before her promotion to EVS

manager in 2015. She is well known and appreciated for her exceptional customer service and organizational expertise. “Sherry’s talents and skills, as well as her warm and caring personality, will go far in continuing the positive Westbrooke spirit,” said IL Director Larry Willett.



Hillwood Estate Tour

Independent living (IL) residents explored the Hillwood estate during a September 27 excursion to Washington, D.C. Purchased in 1955 by businesswoman and philanthropist Marjorie Merriweather Post, the mansion is now a museum that houses an 18th century French decorative art collection as well as the most comprehensive collection of Russian imperial art outside of Russia.

After touring the museum, the group investigated the estate’s spectacular gardens and enjoyed lunch at the Merriweather Café.



*IL LIFE Enrichment and Community Coordinator
Melissa Peterson in Hillwood’s library*

Magic Happens at Petting Zoo

“This is the best day I have ever had at Brooke Grove. No, this is the best day I have ever had in my life!” remarked one resident of time spent with a menagerie of pets and farm animals during a recent Petting Zoo offered at The Meadows. Residents from all levels of care across campus stopped by to visit a miniature pony, a pig, sheep, goats, rabbits, geese, and other critters from Stone Eagle Stables, a family-operated farm located in Jessup, Maryland.

The event prompted many residents who grew up on farms to share their favorite memories, while others chose to stand outside the pen and observe the animals from a distance. The

petting zoo was such a hit that plans are already underway for it to return next year!



Chicken Salt and friends are happy to hang out with The Meadows resident Jennie Brzostowski.

Labor Day Cookout

Like many other Americans across the nation, assisted living residents and staff celebrated Labor Day with a cookout at The Meadows. The special event included great food, live music by the popular Olney Jazz Band and the opportunity to share cherished time with loved ones.

“The weather was hot but tolerable, and the staff worked hard to pull off the occasion so that everything went flawlessly,” noted LIFE Enrichment Director Samantha Dubendorf. “It was so nice to get out and do something different. You all do so such nice things for us!” added one appreciative resident.



Independent living resident Gar Guyton and his wife, The Meadows resident Leben Wee, enjoy the cookout together.

Celebrating Our Stellar Staff

A grab ‘n go breakfast and pizza party were among a long list of fun events that honored employees during National Assisted Living Week, September 10-16. This year’s theme, “A Season of Reflection,” illustrated the incredible bonds created between staff, residents and family members.

“Thank you so much for understanding your role as a LIFE Illustrator and embracing the importance of family,” wrote Administrator Karyna Balbuena in a letter inviting the team to enjoy the week’s events. “You are deserving

of praise, acknowledgement and recognition!”



Handmade thank you cards from residents of The Woods 1614 were a big hit with staff members (l to r) Antoinette Williams and Amy Conteh!

A Trip to Rio

A group of intrepid long-term care residents delighted in a September 20 excursion to Rio, a premier shopping and restaurant destination located in Gaithersburg, Maryland. Accompanied by several members of Brooke Grove Rehabilitation and Nursing Center's LIFE enrichment team, the diners savored a delicious meal at the Yard House, where they chose their favorite American-style dishes from a menu of more than 100, made from scratch choices.

A walk around the lakefront and across the lake's bridge gave residents the opportunity to revel in the autumn breeze and view the local waterfowl. "It was so nice to get out and enjoy

each other's company as well as the beautiful weather!" remarked one participant.



Resident Florence Butler (center) along the lakefront with (l to r) LIFE Enrichment Associate Wanxie Bolen and LIFE Enrichment Director Cia Richards

Celebrating the Gift of Age

Brooke Grove Rehabilitation and Nursing Center extolled the long lives of residents nearing or past the age of 100 during their annual Centenarian Day Celebration on September 22. Bessie Ruskin, a former homemaker and dance teacher who has always embraced life with optimism, took top honors at the age of 105!

As part of the festivities, refreshments were enjoyed by all long-term care residents, and each honoree was recognized with a personalized certificate expressing the staff's pride in their contributions, achievements and exceptional journey.



Resident Bessie Ruskin, 105, is the center of attention during a photo shoot for Centenarian Day honorees.

Life is a Song

Concerts by world-renowned musician Vladimir Fridman are a real treat for rehab guests who relish his monthly appearances at Brooke Grove Rehabilitation and Nursing Center. A guitarist, composer, singer and music teacher, Mr. Fridman began his career in Russia, where he performed in the leading Moscow theaters and at the Philharmonic. He toured Europe, the Middle East and Japan with the group Jazz Balalaika and has released several albums featuring different musical genres and his own compositions.

Since 1998, Mr. Fridman has become widely known in the Greater Washington/Baltimore area, performing solo and together with other leading musicians and bands both locally and abroad.



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UPCOMING EVENTS

VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

Tuesday, November 28 and January 30, 5:30-7 p.m.

One-on-one or online orientation sessions may also be scheduled at a convenient time.

For information, visit bgf.org/volunteers or contact Barbara Hackett at 301-570-7081 or volunteers@bgf.org.

THE MEADOWS AND THE WOODS ASSISTED LIVING HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE FOR RESIDENTS AND FAMILIES

Sunday, December 10, 2-4 p.m.

1614-1635-1637-1639-1641 Hickory Knoll Road

*By invitation. No reservations necessary.
Subject to change.*

