

'Peso' Brings Love and Joy to Dog Mom Helen Perry

THERAPET CLIENT PROFILE

Abandoned and starving in the desert. That's how Therapet Eldercare client and retired registered nurse Helen Perry found her beloved Poodle/Maltese 'Peso' over 6 years ago, with no identification and seemingly no hope for a second chance.

She rescued the rambunctious pup, estimated then to be about six months old, and he's been a family member ever since. A referral from a nurse friend at the El Paso City County Health and Environmental District led Helen to Therapet for assistance providing food and veterinary care for 'Peso.'

"Therapet is a wonderful, friendly organization," explains Helen, now 77 and widowed for three years. "Especially the veterinary care they provide. 'Peso' is prone to dental difficulties, and his teeth must be checked and cleaned quite regularly. It would be very difficult for me to care for him without Therapet paying for his veterinary care."

Therapet Eldercare also helps El Paso area seniors like Helen by working with veterinarians and volunteer drivers on behalf of their companion pets. Assisting hundreds of seniors since its 1985 inception, they offer friendship to pre-qualified program participants while providing food and all veterinary care (most via a mobile veterinary unit) for their dogs, cats, ferrets and birds. Not to be confused with an animal placement service, Therapet supplies food and veterinary services to the companion indoor pets of qualified, low-income elderly in El Paso County, administered completely by one part-time program coordinator, Sandy Connor, who is the only paid staff member.

"Sandy is the heart of Therapet Eldercare," said Board President Michelle Brown. "Her compassion, organization, commitment and love for people and pets can't be underestimated when explaining how Therapet has operated continuously for more than 20 years with her at the helm."

Therapet's 501c-3 non-profit status relies solely on individual contributions (most through pet and people memorials) and historically limited corporate and foundation grants. El Paso Community Foundation, Helen of Troy and the El Paso Veterinary Medical Association count among those who chose to include Therapet in their community giving in the last few years.

To reach and assist as many El Paso elderly as possible, Therapet encourages additional contributions from interested pet health and welfare advocates as

well as those supporters of elderly health issues. Hundreds of studies prove the therapeutic human benefits of sharing life with a companion animal. People enjoy better health, retain independence longer and live happier lives.

Most Therapet clients have no family and many are homebound. That makes these pets their main focus. Knowing more qualified clients are out there, Therapet works with civic organizations, low-income senior housing complexes and social service agencies as well as churches, veterinary hospitals, directors of low-income senior housing complexes and other elderly-oriented organizations to find them.

Clients must live in El Paso, have incomes at or below the poverty level, be at least 60 years old, live alone or only with a spouse, and the companion pets must be limited to two or three (depending on their circumstances).

"These pets are truly their lives," said Sandy. "We know many more qualified clients are out there, we just need help finding them as well as more donations from individuals and corporations to keep our program growing."

Valley Feed/PETsBARN remains a tremendous asset in helping Therapet cover pet care expenses. "As the region's most staunch financial supporter of animal health and welfare non-profits, Valley Feed/PETsBARN and owner Dean Travis have helped us through the years with discounted and donated food and supplies," said Sandy. "This has contributed immensely, boosting our limited budget."

Meanwhile, Helen and 'Peso' walk several times a day around her West El Paso apartment neighborhood, where children and adults stop and talk in admiration of 'Peso's' sweet disposition, friendliness and intelligence.

"He loves to sit on my lap and watch TV, barking at animals on the screen," said the New Jersey native who has resided in El Paso since 1967. "I have health conditions that limit what I can do but I still maintain my independence, cook for myself, clean our home and take care of Peso. We're happy!"

For more information about contributing to Therapet, referring a potential client or to learn more about program qualifications, please call our Program Coordinator at (915) 581-3789.

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