Love: Treme ın 8-month-old, 102-pound bull 102-pound bull mastiff sits through the annual meeting of Pet-A-Pet, while owners Lorna and Arnie Johnson listen to a guest speaker who talked about the human animal human animal bond.





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Human-animal bond seems to improve our survival rates

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An elderly woman walked down the hall at American House, scowling at the 142pound bull mastiff on a leash held by his owner, Lorna Johnson of Westland.

She glared at him, then without any warning, kneed the dog in the chest and said, "Get out of the way!" Johnson recalled being taken aback by the reaction, but even more baffied by the people who saw the incident.

"The staff was very excited. This woman had been there for two years, and that's the first time she ever spoke," Johnson said.

As a valunteer with the Pet-A-

As a volunteer with the Pet-A-Pet program for the past 10 years, Johnson has dozens of sto-ries like that one, memories of the pets she has loved over the years. Chauncy, the kick victim, has passed away, but Cricket, a female, and Tremor, and 8-month-old male, continue work-ing with the elderly, school chil-dren and others who have bene-fited from animal-assisted thera-py.

dren and others who have benefited from animal-aesisted therapy.

Memories like hers filled an entire meeting room at the William B. Costick Center Thursday evening at Pet-A-Pets annual meeting: The organization provides support for volunteers who bring their pets to nursing homes, schools and other care facilities, as well as those who train dogs that assist people with handicaps.

Central to their work is the human-animal bend, an intangible link that appears to have physical and emotional benefits for both, according to guest speaker Dr. Sally Walshaw, an associate professor at Michigan State University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

'I'm sort of preaching to the choir,' she told the audience of more than 50 pet lovers. 'You already know about the human-animal bond. You see it every day, in many situations.'

Walshaw, too, shared memories of her encounters with ani-

■ One scientific study showed a statistically significant improvement in survival rates among patients who suffered coronary thrombosis, when those patients owned pets.

mals, including a weimaraner named Jim, whom she met 26 years ago. A well-loved family dog, Jim was diagnosed with distemper, a disease that paralyzes its victims. Rather than have him "put down," the family asked for instructions about his care, then took him home.

There are people who would not do this for a tiny poodle," she said, "so I had to ask, Why are you willing to do this for this dog?"

The family's answer touched and surprised her. Their son had been a quadriplegic since birth, so they were accustomed to taking care of someone who needed that much help. But they didn't want Jim to suffer, so if it appeared he was in pain, they would call.

A week later, they did, but to tell Walshaw Jim was walking. Several weeks later, when Walshaw visited the family farm, Jim was running through the fields. Doctors at the university theorized the dog's paralysis might have been something similar to Guillan-Barre syndrome, which renders human beings temporarily paralyzed.

"But you know, for me, science didn't cut it," Walshaw said. "To me, Jim was a miracle, and a tribute to the human-animal bond."

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bond."
One scientific study showed a statistically significant improvement in survival rates among patients who suffered coronary thrombosis, when these patients owned pets. Research shows talking to or stroking a dog decreases or stabilizes blood pressure, Walshaw said.
Animal-assisted therapy has

had dramatic effects on people in nursing homes, emotionally disturbed children and psychiatric patients, she added. Walshaw has helped bring farm animals to nursing home residents, many of whom grow up in rural areas, and shed tears of joy at the inemories the calves and chick-cens evoke.

Randy Gasser, Executive Director of Woodhaven Retirement Community in Livonia, said Pet-A-Pet volunteers have been visiting there since 1899.

"Some of our residents who ceally aren't engaged in life really to pen up," he said. "Don't ever stop doing this."

Gasser also praised the faith fulness of program volunteers, many of whom have been bringing their pets to the home for more than 10 years.

Woodhaven and Creseroads for Youth are both featured in a book of photographs and words. "You Have a Visitor," by Rence Lamm Escrid, who followed Pet-A-Pet volunteers for their support and friendship.

Karen Tuohy has seen first-hand how the organization helps troubled kids. Representing Creseroads for Youth in Oxford, she thanked Pet-A-Pet volunteers for their support and friendship.

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"We serve rough, tough temperature for sharing their pets once amonth."

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"He justice system, are afraid of the animals, it doesn't take long for them to get used to the dogs.

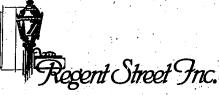
"They love to have you come," she said. "You area tribute to volunteersm."

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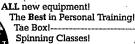


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