

Pets are helping seniors cope

By Marie Chesney
staff writer

Have pet, will travel.
That's precisely the kind of person the Humane Society of Southeastern Michigan is looking for, pet owners willing to cart Fido or Muffy once a month to a local nursing home and let the seniors experience the joy of cuddling a friendly, furry animal.
"Animal therapy can lower blood pressure through stroking and petting, relieve loneliness and depression, provide a feeling of being loved, and stimulate laughter," said Karen Salswedel, the society's director.
"All these things are particularly

important to our older citizens in nursing homes."

TWO YEARS ago, Salswedel started a Pet-A-Pet program now used by 14 nursing homes in southeast Michigan, including homes in Livonia and Redford Township.

The society is now expanding the program into the Farmington Nursing Home, 38405 Folsom, Farmington Hills, and needs pets (and their owners) to come to the home the second Saturday of each month.

The first visit at the Farmington home starts 10 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 13, and lasts about an hour.

"After an hour, the people and the

animals get tired," said Ruth Curry, a Redford resident who takes "Mama Cat" each month to the Middlebelt Nursing Care Center in Livonia and Cambridge West, Inc. in Redford Township.

"Mama Cat," owned by Curry's veterinarian son, spends her days roaming the Dearborn Heights Animal Hospital and her Saturdays being petted and loved by seniors in both Redford and Livonia.

BESIDES "MAMA Cat," Curry also takes strays and adoptable animals from the animal hospital to the two nursing homes.

But she prefers volunteer pet own-

ers because they know their own pet's personality.

"The program started real strong and has grown," Curry said. "The seniors love it. It's a time for them to laugh and be happy a little bit."

The animals' vaccination record must be up-to-date; they must also be well-groomed, well-mannered, and flea-and-worm free.

"Our ideal is an adoptable animal with a good disposition who is people-oriented," Salswedel said. "And we don't disqualify an animal because of size."

Pet owners wanting to join the program in any of the three communities should call Salswedel at 751-2570.

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