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# caninefriends pet therapy

Dogs helping people



## Annual Founder's Day announced Happy Birthday Eileen!

Canine Friends Pet therapy is establishing an annual reminder day for members. 'We now have nearly 800 members throughout New Zealand. Most of these people do not personally know Eileen Curry who founded Canine Friends some 30 years ago. "It's important that all members understand Eileen's vision of pet therapy visits to comfort hospital patients and rest home residents. That is the foundation of our organisation"' says president, Ann Evans.

Eileen recalls the incident that prompted her to gather a group of friends in 1990 to discuss an idea she had. "While I was with the SPCA I met an elderly woman who was about to move from her house into a small flat. She was not allowed to take her dog with her. She had no family to take the dog. Her despair at parting from



Urged to take more refugees P6



Ho Le Br

## The Hutt News

Tuesday, September 8, 2015



Lower Hutt Civic Award winner Eileen Curry with one of Canine Friends Pet Therapy's recruits, Rusty the golden retriever.

## Paws down, Eileen's made a big difference

SIMON EDWARDS

Eileen Curry's Lower Hutt Civic Award, presented last week, should probably have carried a dog's paw print as well as Mayor Ray Wallace's signature.

Her partnership between dogs, their owners and people in hospitals and rest homes who like nothing more than a visit from man's best friend has made a difference around New Zealand.

In the late 1980s, the then Waiuku resident saw how distressed a migrant from Scotland became when her "home was sold from under her" and she could no longer keep her dog. Curry, who was a breeder of

golden retrievers, Cairns terriers and labradors, found the woman's dog a home.

"I realised she was going to be without her best friend and alone, and I said 'would it make a difference if I brought my dog to visit you?'"

Before long, Curry was getting calls from Te Omanga Hospice and the Presbyterian Home to bring dogs to visit patients and residents.

When it all became too much, she roped in dog-owning friends to help.

Canine Friends Pet Therapy was formed in Waiuku in 1990 and now there are 500 members bringing furry compan-

**"If you've had a dog, loved a dog...it doesn't go away."**

Eileen Curry

ions into more than 200 homes and hospitals around the country.

Eileen was present until 2012 and still attends every committee meeting.

For Curry the reward is to see elderly folk who may sit around in rest home lounges not saying much to anyone light up when a dog puts their paws in their lap. If they've owned dogs, it can bring tears and laughter as memories come to mind.

"Suddenly they're talking to others about it."

"If you've had a dog, loved a dog...it doesn't go away."

At hospitals, staff can enjoy the dogs' visits as much as patients. It can be a real stress reliever.

When the Waiuku SPCA was set up in 1977, Curry was on the first committee. Now it's part of Wellington SPCA.

She was part of a team of volunteers who established and trained the first guide dog puppies in New Zealand in 1973.

Curry has also given 33 years service to Arthritis New Zealand, including in Waiuku, where for years she ran an exercise group.

Curry and Eileen always attracted media attention

her beloved companion was terrible to see. The bond between her and the dog was so strong ... one hand was touching the dog's head while he sat close to her. The dog was aware of her distress. That picture has stayed with me for decades."

Eileen offered to visit with her own dog to help the woman settle in. She realised that this was something that a group of friends could do together. With three friends, Elaine Varcoe and Joan Mackie from the guide dog breeding scheme and Cay Marshall (Bridge) from a dog obedience background, the first team was established. They all

Our cover shot from Canine Friends 25th anniversary book shows Eileen with her beloved Kerrie



had the same desire to help and the same understanding of dogs and people.

'Canine Friends is all about the love dogs have for people and our wish to share that with others,' Eileen says. 'Even in today's high tech world of instant communication nothing can replace the personal connection between people. When this is magnified through a dog this becomes something extraordinary.'

Eileen Curry is celebrating her 93rd birthday this month and in her honour a National Founder's Day will be held every year. Canine Friends newsletter editor Beverley Jocelyn explains. 'We will hold special events in all the regions where our 800 plus members are working. Our long serving volunteers will be recognised at these events. And it will give us all time to reflect on why we give our time and energy to



Dame Patsy Reddy with Eileen Curry and Wellington members visiting Te Hopai recently



Dame Patsy and Eileen share a laugh with Jack the Border Collie and his mum

pet therapy which is so beneficial to so many people. Beverley is organising the first National Founders Day with one event being held in Lower Hutt and a programme which will be held in different centres around the country.

Vice president Vicky Graham has known Eileen since 1988 when she bought her second Golden Retriever from Eileen and Ray's Makkovik Kennels and has been a member of the organisation since.. 'Thanks to Eileen's initiative thousands of people who are lonely, troubled, stressed or missing their own beloved pets have received companionship and comfort from our visiting teams.'

Eileen and Ray Curry's Makkovik Kennels was for decades synonymous with success as they showed their dogs and judged local and international dog shows. As president of Wellington Labrador Club Ray spearheaded the development of guide dog training in New Zealand during the 1970s. At that time visually impaired people were sent to Australia or England to train with their dogs at great cost. Some of the first guide dogs here were bred and trained by Ray and Eileen.

Eileen has always been an animal rights crusader and was Founding President of Wainuiomata SPCA and held that role for ten years.

Eileen enjoys a pet therapy visit from a conveniently sized knee sitting Chihuahua

She has no recall of how many dogs she has lived with but many years of breeding dogs and rescuing strays, saw hundreds of dogs pass through the Curry household. "At one time we had 12 Golden Retrievers and Labradors, eight terriers and a Cocker Spaniel, seven SPCA cats and two SPCA dogs. At that point Ray issued an ultimatum!

Too late ... dogs had the final word. Their last litter of 14 Golden Retrievers was born very soon after Ray passed away in 1999.

Founder's Day gives everyone connected with Canine Friends an opportunity to reflect on Eileen's lifetime of achievement,' Ann Evans says.

