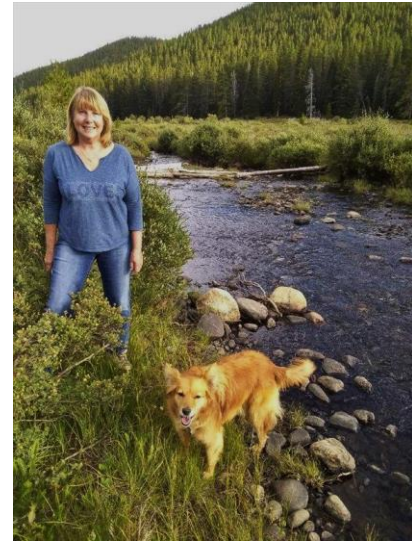


## Carol Pehrson and Oma



Oma was homeless, with puppies, living on a New Mexican reservation when she and her puppies were transferred to the Denver Dumb Friends League and were adopted separately. The initial adoption individual could not care for Oma, so we adopted her into our family the Spring of 2011. Poor girl! You would think that with the rough first few years she would be timid and untrusting...but it seemed to shape her into the very opposite!! She truly is one of the most

trusting and loving dogs we have ever had!! We're not sure what breed she is and jokingly will say she looks like a "fox"! She loves camping, rides in the car and walking on a daily basis with her neighborhood buddies...all 7 dogs and 5 of us ladies!



It was at a family gathering, when Oma was "working the room", quietly walking to everyone and gently nudging their arm until she gets a pet. That's when Gary's mom said.."You should bring Oma to the senior center, they'd love her to visit". Thus, began the journey of Oma becoming a therapy dog. I found DPP online and read about animal assisted therapy and thought with a bit of work Oma and I could be a therapy team. As a retired educator I wanted to stay in touch with people and what better way to touch lives than through a furry friend! It was our chance to make a difference! In 2016 Oma and I passed our evaluation and began visiting with seniors and also a memory care center. Oma seemed to sense the

gentleness needed to lay her head in a lap and stare at a person with her soulful eyes. So many memories and stories were shared of beloved pets these seniors had when they were younger. Oma is not allowed on furniture, at home, so I had to "bend the rules" and teach her how to jump onto a couch to lay with someone who could not reach her when we were visiting. It actually took her quite a while to learn and now understands when she's



wearing her vest she's actually allowed on a couch! (No wonder she can hardly wait to get her work vest on!!)



As time went by, we attended more de-stress events with DPP and it became very apparent that the bigger the crowd, the more belly rubbing she could get!! That was all that was needed to realize she absolutely loved being the center of attention in a crowd of people. It was at one of these events that Susan Horecki told me that Devereux of Colorado (A residential treatment center for children and teens) was looking to add more teams to their program, so I met with Karen and her dog Chewy and shadowed them while they interacted with an individual and a group therapy session. I knew

Oma could make a difference in this setting and for the past 2 years we have continued to do individual and group therapy with teens at Devereux. I've watched Oma lay next to a young girl crying and lick her tears, another girl never stopped her crying in group until she finally laid her hand on Oma and numerous others holding Omas' ears and looking into her eyes with a trust not always found in their tumultuous lives. These same teens who may have trouble communicating with each other can tell when Oma is happy, sad, scared or thirsty and



carefully tell new resident teens how to approach Oma, how to use "gentle hands" and quiet voices" and if "Oma really trusts you she'll even let you hold her paw"! Of course, for Oma, it means she gets more belly rubs in her life than we can ever give her at home!

*DPP Team of the Month (October 2019)*

