

Ken's Story



You can imagine my surprise when Amy asked me to be the Team of the Month for January. After all, there IS no team - just me! I'm not even a handler - so go figure. Anyway, it is indeed my honor to write my story. So what to write about? I have no visits with my partner to describe to you, so I think the best thing I can do is tell you a bit about my journey with Denver Pet Partners / American Humane AAT and describe some of the highlights I have experienced along the way.

Apart from my wife Diana, I am the only other person who has been part of DPP from the beginning, so I have seen it all. And what was the beginning like? First, we had to get to Denver so there could be a Denver Pet Partners in the first place. Our move here was nothing short of providential and was the result of a transfer through my company. If you know Diana at all, you know the passion she has for animals and for helping others.

Almost from day

one she wanted to put the two together and do something to help others with our Golden Retriever, Shana. As it turned out, her doctor had her offices next door to Swedish Medical Center. So one day, after a routine checkup, Diana walked into the Volunteer department at SMC and asked the then director, Sally Jo Thomas, if they had a visiting animal program. She said they did not have one, so Diana offered to start one with Shana. Sally Jo said they had wanted to start one for some time and was thrilled at Diana's offer. Thus began the first program for what was to become Denver Pet Partners. There was one team - Diana and Shana - an enthusiastic client - SMC - and a very large hospital eager to have an animal-assisted therapy program. Swedish was, and to this day still is the flagship program for AH AAT.



Diana connected with Linda Hines, then president and CEO of Delta Society about establishing a presence in the Denver area. Linda was naturally thrilled at this prospect and gave Diana her full support. The new entity would be called Denver Pet Partners.

Now that this organization was underway Diana needed a number of things put in place to help her manage the various business activities. Enter me. First she needed a place to work so we converted one of our bedrooms into "DPP Headquarters". I also built Diana a new computer to help her. Diana managed DPP from that small office for 8 years during which time it grew from

1 team to 150 teams with more than 30 programs in place. No one knows how much time it took Diana to manage DPP - so believe me when I tell you that 60+ work weeks were the norm for her during that time. Her commitment to excellence was, and still is, second to none.

We also needed a website to keep people informed of the growing number of DPP activities. She asked me if I could build one... I said I didn't know how... She asked me if I could learn... What could I say? No? Of course not! So I set out to learn how to build and publish websites in Microsoft FrontPage. Our

first humble website went live in 2002. I was amazed that I was able to create a website that would be accessed around the world! I mean, that is really cool when you think about it. Our website was and still is used to educate people about AAA/AAT, to inform them about upcoming

trainings, evaluations, and meetings, and to feature our fabulous teams who made the whole thing possible. And our exciting *new* website is almost ready!



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"All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence."
(Martin Luther King, Jr.)

I'd be remiss not to mention the pictures. From the start we have chronicled the various aspects of DPP in pictures. Thank goodness for digital photography! At last count I have in excess of 10,000 pictures about DPP. There are pictures of training events, monthly meetings, evaluations, public events, visitations, and our members. Through all the work with pictures over the years I have honed yet another skill - working with Photoshop! Actually, our teams look so good that I hardly ever have to use Photoshop for anything more than cropping and resizing! I do believe that I have become somewhat synonymous with my camera though. Why do I say that? Well, if I show up at an event without my camera, people usually ask me if I am OK! One of the highlights of my journey was the time I was presented with about \$500 at one of the monthly meetings to help with the purchase of a new, more advanced camera! This money had been collected from the donations of our terrific members. I was amazed at this show of generosity toward me and, to this day, this is probably the only time I can recall that I have been at a loss for words. The amazing camera I purchased, a Canon Rebel XSi Single Lens Reflex, is what I use today and I think of you all every time I use it.

I mentioned earlier that I do not have any visit stories to share with you, and that is true to the extent that I have not conducted any visits myself. However, there was one amazing visit that I was privileged to be part of that shall forever reinforce in my mind the depth and significance of what you who have partners provide every time you visit a client. If you've ever seen what we call the "Helga video" you know what I am talking about. We show this video at our handler training workshops. It tells the story of a visit I witnessed between Diana and Rigo (our black lab and Diana's pet partner), and Helga, a patient at University of Colorado Hospital. I tagged along to take pictures and video, which I did. What I did not count on was how I would be personally impacted by this manifestation of the human-animal bond in action. Helga entered the room and, for whatever reason, did not want a visit. I started to put the camera away. Then, something magical happened - she looked at Rigo and her whole demeanor changed. Now, she

wanted to see more of him, and the visit was on. With Diana's help, Helga had Rigo come to her and sit at her feet. She was describing the hearts and butterflies on Rigo's felt vest. You could see how hard she was trying to clearly articulate the words her therapists had asked her to repeat. So I'm there recording all this and trying not to show how I'm starting to lose it emotionally. At the end, she said as sincerely as she could "I Love Rigo" and kissed his card that Diana had given her. That was it - by now I'm a puddle. I had heard of the power of the human-animal bond, now I had experienced it - and it is both powerful and humbling. Nothing any of the humans present could have done would have motivated Helga to do what she did - it was only Rigo's presence, and the magical connectedness between him and Helga that made that magical moment a reality.



Another highlight was when Diana was approached by Marie Wheatley, president and CEO of American Humane, to join forces with American Humane. I remember the day distinctly - Diana had gone to AHA to discuss the possible use of some office space so she wouldn't have to keep



using her home office - it was just getting too small. She came home and, with an introduction of "you'll never believe what happened today" proceeded to tell me about Marie's offer. The AH leadership even came to our home to discuss it further and to answer all of Diana's questions. No one else besides Diana and I know how much she agonized over what to do with that offer. We talked many, many hours about it. Would it be right for the team? What would they think? How to decide? In the end, what was most important to Diana was what would be best for the teams. DPP was getting too large for her to run alone, and this merger with AHA would ensure

the ongoing viability of the organization, and those in need would be able to continue to experience the power of the human-animal bond. You know now what decision was made and it has been good.

I see I've babbled on so long that I've run into page 3, so I think I should wrap it up for now. I'll continue to be a "behind-the-scenes" guy - taking pictures, fielding frantic tech support calls from Amy, making lunch at evals (sometimes at least) especially Papa Murphy's pizza, maintaining the website, playing Kenny the Kid at evals ("you betta watch out"), even moving tables and chairs - whatever is needed to help Diana, Amy, and Meagan. I also look forward to meeting our teams - both new and old - and to hopefully providing some encouragement to you who, along with your Partners, do the real work of healing lives through the human-animal bond. You are all amazing.



Thanks for listening.