

Spreading paw-sitivity, one pet at a time

Aggieland Pets With A Purpose celebrates 23 years of service

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From Tuesdays in Rudder Plaza to recurring visits at local hospitals, members and their pets travel across the Bryan-College Station area to bring smiles to all in attendance.

Aggieland Pets With A Purpose, or APWAP, is a non-profit established in 2002 directly in the heart of Aggieland. This month, the group celebrates 23 years of service.

Despite the common assumption that most service pets are cats and dogs, the organization also extends to rabbits and miniature horses. While one may be taken aback by seeing a miniature horse on campus, APWAP President Kit Darling said animals and members alike have a common goal.



Photo courtesy of Kit Darling

“Our goal is to share animals’ unconditional love with people in the community,” Darling said. “The short version: brightening people’s day, and I see that over and over again.”

The group was based as a spinoff from an advanced obedience class which led to their founding, Darling said.

“There were a couple of people in the class who had done therapy work and dog work in Dallas,” Darling said. “So they were all interested in starting a group here and several of us were interested, so that kind of formed the core group.”

In its early years, the organization had to reach out to companies and organizations for event opportunities, but this has since changed. With numerous events each month, almost all are made through outside organizations contacting APWAP.

The group hosts many events throughout the year, including their special recurring events, one of which is “Tiny Dog Tuesday”. Every Tuesday from noon to 1 p.m., APWAP Treasurer Jacob Miller can be found in Rudder Plaza while his pup Stella offers endless cuddles to passersby.

“I enjoy volunteering, I get a lot from it, but Stella gets even more,” Miller said. “I see my dog smile and it just warms your heart. We get students crying and Stella calms them down. You can just see in real time how it really helps people.”



Photo courtesy of Kit Darling

As the organization celebrates 23 years of service, Miller said it’s important to remember what the organization was truly built for.

“Nobody’s patting me on the back for doing this,” Miller said. “I’m doing this because I want to, because Stella wants to. We’re trying to make more good in the world. We’re changing lives here.”

In addition to their Tuesday campus adventures, every semester members bring their pets to Texas A&M libraries to relieve stress in tough academic periods.

“Almost as long as I’ve been at the libraries, and I’ve been here over 16 years, I feel like I remember seeing the animals come during finals,” Learning and Student Engagement Librarian Chance Medlin said. “I think there is magic in that kind of connection with a living being. It’s like a physical relief of stress.”

The pets in the organization help to bring joy, not only to students, but to local community members. Miller said that when one goes without their pet, seeing APWAP's animals can bring a moment of normalcy back to their daily lives.

"There's such an immediate feedback from when you go to see people, especially in the hospitals," Miller said. "It takes them back to better places. They're not sitting in a hospital, now they're just petting a dog and thinking about theirs."

Every month, APWAP members travel to local hospitals and nursing homes in order to bring smiles to patients when they are away from home.

"The dogs have a way of helping relieve anxiety in some almost magical ways," St. Joseph Volunteer and Services Manager William Shaw said. "It's hard to understand until you see it, and that makes me smile. I like seeing people interact with the dogs."

While positive benefits are reaped by many, APWAP's members count themselves lucky to be at the top of that list.

"I feel like I've received so many blessings doing this," Darling said. "... And the blessing is seeing that smile on someone's face."