BLUE MOON AT UCLA

PAC welcomed a special team at its monthly Pet Visit Station in July. Hospital visitors, patients, and staff had a blast horsing around with Blue Moon, a miniature therapy horse from the Malibu Mountains, and her handler, Victoria. As the first therapy animal other than a dog to visit Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center in 24 years, the 28-inch tall mini-horse was a delightful surprise. She amazed the crowd with various tricks, such as her dazzling smile, “high-fives,” and keyboard playing. Everyone at the Pet Visit Station had the opportunity to stroke Blue Moon’s remarkably soft mane and coat and take pictures with her. Her cheerful disposition and prancing for the camera, as well as love of children and adults alike, attracted visitors of all ages. Blue Moon is one of eight miniature therapy horses owned by Victoria. Trained and tested for therapy work in hospitals, much like the PAC dogs, Blue Moon often works at the VA hospital, with the Sheriff’s Department, and in schools and libraries.

HONORING PAC VOLUNTEERS

On June 15, PAC held a Volunteer Recognition Luncheon at the UCLA Meyer and Renee Luskin Conference Center to honor the commitment of the program’s volunteers. More than 50 of PAC’s dedicated teams attended the event, along with UCLA staff and friends of PAC who have been touched by the program. PAC Director, Erin Rice, welcomed the luncheon guests and shared insights about what the program has accomplished in the past two years and what it plans to offer in the future. Ten PAC volunteers whose dogs had recently passed were honored for their service, each receiving a memorial floral arrangement presented by PAC Coordinator, Kunal Wahi. Lori Garcia and Robbie Harris, the Unit Director and Recreational Therapist from the Stewart and Lynda Resnick Neuropsychiatric Hospital at UCLA, spoke about the positive impact of the PAC program on psychiatric patients. The guest speaker for the afternoon was Ellie Laks, founder and CEO of The Gentle Barn. She shared her journey to start The Gentle Barn and how it has become a haven for all types of rescue animals that provide comfort and therapy to children and adults. The luncheon concluded with a final round of recognitions and gifts, and a big thank-you to PAC volunteers for their selfless service to date and in the years to come.
Each gift directed to PAC transforms the patient experience and helps to ensure that this “paws”itive program can continue to serve our UCLA Health family. If you would like to make a donation to support UCLA’s People-Animal Connection, please contact:

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VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: BETH AND JASPER

All teams involved in the PAC program advance its mission of bringing comfort and healing to patients, families, and staff of UCLA Health through the unconditional affection of four-legged friends. Beth Goldfarb and her dog Jasper are vital members of the program.

Beth has been a PAC volunteer for about 10 years, first with her dog Scout and now with Jasper; both have been rescued from the Downey Shelter. “After my first PAC dog, Scout, passed away, I knew I wanted to get another dog immediately so I could continue working with the PAC program,” Beth said. She noted that after being introduced to the program by fellow volunteer Jane Tomlinson, she “couldn’t even imagine my life without it.”

When asked if there is one memory that stands out for her, Beth shared the following: “one of my very first visits with Jasper was with a young man who had been in a terrible motorcycle accident. His speech was slurred and I had a difficult time understanding him, but I could tell that he was thrilled to see Jasper and wanted to tell me all about his dogs at home, whom he missed very much. His mother was there and she kept thanking us for visiting. She said it made her son VERY happy. A few weeks later, we visited the same young man and before I could get all the way through the doorway, he yelled out ‘JASPER!’ which put a big smile on my face. We don’t often get to see the same patients twice, but when we do and they tell us how much it meant to them to have a visit with a PAC dog, it melts my heart. It’s a good reminder of why we’re volunteering with PAC in the first place.”

Beth says that her dedication to the PAC program stems from a love of its purpose. “After a couple of hours of visiting with patients, I am reminded to be very thankful for what I have,” she says. “It puts things in perspective, and for that I am beyond grateful.” Beth’s devotion to serving her community exemplifies the big-heartedness of PAC volunteers.