

SHARING 'LOVE ON A LEASH'

Evacuee shares therapy dogs at fire camp

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Feeling helpless against the raging Canyon Creek Complex fire that has threatened her Dean Creek cabin adjacent to Upper Pine Creek, Yvonne Pepin-Wakefield has handled the trauma by helping others with her two certified therapy dogs, Zachary and Henry.

She stayed several days at the fire camp in John Day, sharing her dogs at the Grant County Fairgrounds while waiting for news about her cabin's fate.

She has seen the soothing benefits her pets have on others, especially firefighters and fire personnel.

"Here at 5:30 a.m., big burly guys came up — at first they had a stern expression — and as soon as they see the dogs, they get a big smile," she said.

Part of having therapy dogs is also sitting down to talk with people.

"One Native American woman told me all about her life and took three stuffed-animal dogs for her children," she said.

The basket of toys was do-



Enjoying a visit with the therapy dogs at the fire camp petting station are (clockwise) camp crew members Lorinda Chicharello (front, left) of Ramah, NM, and Harris Skeet of Pinehill, NM, equipment transport driver Kay Steele, of Ritter, and Blue Mountain Hospital paramedic Kara Kohfield, of John Day.

Eagle photos/Angel Carpenter

nated by New Hope for Eastern Oregon Animals.

"Some say, 'Thank you, this is the best part of our day,'" Pepin-Wakefield said.

She noticed the dogs were especially needed last Friday, the day before the winds changed direction and fire

threatened Prairie City.

She has, perhaps, needed the calm her therapy dogs bring, as much as anyone.

While her cabin is a get-away spot, and not a primary residence, it holds special significance to Pepin-Wakefield. She built the remote home

at age 18 with help from some local residents — the property, 80 acres at the time, was purchased with inheritance money from her father.

"So many people helped build that cabin," she said. "They're my family because I didn't have one."



Fire information officer Sarah Gracey with the Kentucky Division of Forestry holds therapy dog Zachary. Gracey said she's missed her own dachshund back at home in Frankfort, Ky.

An artist and author, Pepin-Wakefield was traveling to her Grant County cabin from her home in The Dalles to edit a project on Aug. 14, the day the Canyon Creek fire first blew out of control.

In the last two weeks, she spent nine days at the fire camp, sleeping in the bed of her pickup.

In The Dalles, she volunteers with her dogs through the non-

profit Love on a Leash, visiting cancer patients at Mid-Columbia Medical Center.

They "reduce their anxiety and stress while the patients are in the hospital," she said.

Henry has also helped children with learning disabilities with the Read to Rover program.

"Those same healing and communicative principles apply on a fire line," Pepin-Wakefield said.

The empathy has gone both ways.

When the fire roared to life near her cabin last week, she said she started to get teary-eyed.

"I went back to the camp, and a big firefighter from Bend asked how I was doing," she said.

He gave her a hug. "It was really neat because every morning he would come and check on me," she added.

So far, her cabin has survived the Canyon Creek Complex fire, but at last check the fire was still burning 500 feet away.

Allowing others to enjoy holding her dogs turned out to be a benefit to her as well, said Pepin-Wakefield, who had to return to The Dalles last weekend.

"The only thing I could do was share the therapy dogs," she said.

COMMUNITY VOICES

Church bell tolls once again

By Reiba Carter Smith and Gaye Pruitt

For the Blue Mountain Eagle

Congregation members donate money and material to restore building

The bell tones echoed across the valley and up the hillsides from the old Fox Church steeple, for the first time in a long time — and people heard the call.

In spite of the disastrous event of unrestrainable wildfires and smoke, there was standing-room only inside the church for a restoration fundraiser Aug. 23.

A small group of descendants from the early settlers, who built the church in 1889, have tried to maintain this inheritance, but lack of resources — financial, material and manpower — were a great deterrent until "hope rained eternal" with a luncheon and old-time gospel music service.

The Grant County Pickers, led by Ron Phillips, played until dusk. A brief message and history of the church was presented by Jackie and Katie Johns. Those attending were generous with donations and pledges of help and material. Al Cummings has already begun repairs on the front steps and ramp.

The church was built by community cooperation on land donated by Frank McGirr. It seems only appropriate that the community restore it and resume service



Contributed photo

to the people.

The residents of the Fox Valley area are so grateful and appreciative of everyone who attended the fundraiser and would welcome anyone interested in the restoration and salvation of

this heritage.

For more information or to make a donation, contact Pat McGirr, 541-421-3379.

Reiba Carter Smith and Gaye Pruitt are members of the Long Creek Historical Society.

Ira and I would like to say THANK YOU to all who have given their time and efforts in this difficult time, the firefighters, law enforcement, the volunteers, the friends, and the distance support we have received from sister churches and loved ones.

We are so thankful to be alive, and we are looking to the future with hope and anticipation. Grant County is a great place to live. God bless you all.



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People from throughout Grant County fill the Fox Community Church Aug. 23 for a restoration fundraiser that included a potluck lunch and entertainment from a variety of area musicians.

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