



ED PIECZYNSKI PHOTOS

Left, Angela Zumwalt with Ruth Holm and Grace; above, Edris Daughtry and Bee praying with Sparky looking on

Moore County Therapy Dogs Celebrated and Blessed

BY ANGELA ZUMWALT

Special to The Pilot

Earlier this year, an invitation was extended to all known therapy dog handlers, past (last eight years) and present, to attend a celebration and blessing of Moore County therapy dogs.

Fifteen dogs and around 30 people gathered on a bright spring Saturday morning in the beautiful Healing Garden at the Clara McLean House in Pinehurst. Rebecca Ainslie, director, Lynda Acker and the Healing Garden volunteers provided a stunning and truly meaningful venue for the occasion.

The event was organized and sponsored by volunteers from the Citizens' Pet Responsibility Committee of Moore County and its associated Reading Tails program.

The service was led by and the blessing given by the Rev. John G. Talk IV, of Emmanuel Episcopal Church, in Southern Pines.

Talk, an avid dog lover and also president of the Moore County Literacy Council, was a perfect fit for the occa-

sion. Many of the therapy dog teams work with the Reading Tails program, which pairs teams with students who are striving to improve their reading and comprehension skills. Therapy dogs enjoy listening to students read and pass no judgment, offering only silent encouragement.

Therapy dogs no longer with us were remembered and acknowledged for their service to the community. Owners of those dogs brought a favorite photo of their sweet dog to hold and show. Cinder, Stubben, Tux, Chinook, Scout, Abby and Suni were remembered. Current therapy dog activities in Moore County stand on the shoulders of these teams that have gone before them.

Also honored were retired therapy dogs, some of whom were at the event: Abby, Tess, Elvis, Buddy and Blue. They received the blessing, along with current therapy dogs, who serve in Moore County schools as part of the Pet Responsibility Committee's Education Program, the Reading Tails program or in other capacities with challenged



The Rev. John Talk with Ray Lizzio and Deke

students.

There are also dogs who visit

Hospice, FirstHealth and other care facilities. Other dogs have served as "comfort" dogs during times of community distress.

Those dogs are Sparky, Grace, Beanie, Bee, Hogan, Gabe, Max, Lily, Deke and Bonnie.

The therapy dog owners shared heartwarming and touching stories of the impact their dogs have had during their work in the community. The hugely positive impact of all therapy animals is just starting to be recognized and measured.

Bee Daughtry and her owner, Edris, closed the service by bowing their heads in prayer. Ed Pieczynski, Pet Responsibility Committee photographer, captured the event with photos.

For more information on the Citizens' Pet Responsibility Committee and the Reading Tails program, visit www.mcprc.org or call (910) 949-9953.

Angela Zumwalt is the chairwoman of the Citizens' Pet Responsibility Committee.