

RESPONSIBILITY COMMITTEE

Presentation Highlights Pet Group

BY JAYMIE BAXLEY

Staff Writer

A recent meeting of the Moore County Board of Commissioners was attended by a delegation of very good dogs.

The canine cohort appeared unfazed by the large number of humans in attendance and the government business being conducted at the back of the crowded courthouse. As ambassadors of the Moore County Citizens' Pet Responsibility Committee, the therapy dogs are used to being around people.

Angela Zumwalt, chair of the non-profit MCCRPC, explained that the dogs travel to elementary school classrooms throughout the county helping young children improve their reading skills.

"They go into the schools and they work with the children in small groups, and the children will read to the dogs," Zumwalt said in a presen-

tation to the commissioners on Nov. 15. "Dogs are a lot less judgmental than humans are, and the kids love reading to them."

It is one of several programs overseen by the committee, which was founded in 2007 to "provide and drive solutions to the pet overpopulation crisis in Moore County." Much of that work, Zumwalt said, is done through education and outreach to local schools.

"Our school program obviously ground to a halt during COVID, but it was Carthage Elementary last year that opened the gates for us to start again," she said. "They were really the needed impetus."

Zumwalt said the "floodgates were opened" after the program resumed at Carthage Elementary, which was joined this spring by eight more schools.

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Beanie, one of several therapy dogs that attended a pet responsibility presentation in Carthage on Nov. 15

Pets

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"We are really thrilled to say that we are back in the schools again and back with our message," she said.

The message has resonated with students like Ryland Callicutt, a fourth-grader at Highfalls Elementary who won a committee-organized essay contest about the importance of getting animals spayed and neutered. Callicutt was invited to read his winning submission, titled "I Can Help Stop Pet Overpopulation in

Our County," during the MCCPRC's presentation to the commissioners.

"I want to help others get their pets spayed or neutered because I don't want a bunch of unwanted pets roaming free around the county," he said, reading from the essay.

"We don't want people working at the animal shelter stressed out because of so many unwanted pets that they have to take care of and spay and neuter. If someone's pet poodle has, let's say, seven puppies, it's going to be hard to find homes for all of those puppies and get them spayed and neutered."

In addition to bringing pet responsibility programs to local schools, the commit-

tee offered free services to pet owners as part of an eight-day event earlier this year. During the event, members of the MCCPRC and its partner agencies distributed over 4,200 pounds of dog and cat food, provided nearly 300 free veterinary examinations and administered 555 rabies vaccinations, with most of the shots going to animals that had never before been vaccinated.

Zumwalt said Charlene Fausz, manager of prevention programs for the committee, arranged transport for about 187 pets in need of sterilization this year from northern Moore County, where veterinary services are less readily available. Those surgeries prevented the birth

of more than 1,122 puppies and kittens.

Dr. Tom Daniel, a Southern Pines veterinarian who serves on the committee, estimated that the \$23,500 in funding allocated by the county to the committee this year has yielded a \$99,364 return on investment.

Following the presentation, Frank Quis, chairman of the commissioners, thanked the committee for its efforts on behalf of his fellow board members.

"Being proactive is a big part of the solution, and you all are definitely making results happen," he said.

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