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Stop, 'Paws' and Read Program Visits Cameron Elementary

BY ANGELA NORTH ZUMWALT Special to The Pilot
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Therapy dog teams, front row, Beth Skewis and Jackson, Lisa Corbett and Harper, Anne Merkel and Cooper, Anne Krahnert and Millie, Wynne Wroblewski and Noel; back row, Doris and Bill Russell with Fleece, Suzie and Al Wall with Beanie, Barb Ross with Lola, Sarah Monzillo with Charlie, Ursula Walsh with Posey, Liz Surface with Elmer, Mary Wood with Remy.

CONTRIBUTED

On a brisk afternoon in early November, 12 therapy dogs and their handlers gathered outside Cameron Elementary School at the invitation of teacher and librarian Lori Paulus.

The school-wide reading celebration for this school year at Cameron Elementary is based around a pet theme, “Reading is PAWSitively Awesome!” After nine weeks of the reading program, Paulus invited students to Stop, “PAWS” and Read in their classrooms with some special guests — the therapy dogs and their handlers from the Moore County Therapy Dogs organization.

After posing for a group photo, the 12 teams made their way to 12 different classrooms to visit with students in grades K-5. Once there, they visited with the students, read a pet-themed book, chosen by Paulus, to the students and then answered questions about their pet and what it means to be a “therapy” dog.



One of the most important things the students learned is the importance of being a responsible pet owner. They also learned about the difference between a service dog and a therapy dog. Service dogs are dedicated to serving just one person and responding to that person’s special needs. They are working while they are with their person and should not be disturbed. Therapy dogs, on the other hand, are trained to respond to all the people that ask to meet them and they bring love and comfort to many people.

Moore County Therapy Dogs provide joy and comfort to people experiencing emotional pain and struggles. It might be through helping a child become more comfortable facing challenges in learning how to read and understand passages, sitting with someone who is struggling with physical or emotional pain, or just simply by being there. The therapy dogs make a difference in lives, a difference that cannot be fully measured, except by smiles and hugs.

After the Stop, “PAWS” and Read event, Paulus said, “This was a wonderful celebration for the students. They enjoyed listening to a story with a special furry guest present in the classroom. The dogs bring such a sweet spirit to the environment — uplifting and encouraging.”

The Moore County Therapy Dog teams are part of the Moore County Citizens’ Pet Responsibility Committee (PRC). They support the PRC in its work to bring a Pet Responsibility Program to over 1,000 fourth graders in Moore County. The therapy dogs are ambassadors in the classroom — the epitome of a well-trained, loved and cared for pet. The volunteers and their dogs work as a team to become certified and insured.

More information about this program can be found at mcprc.org/outreach-programs/reading-tails/

The handlers meet on a quarterly basis to exchange ideas and discuss the different environments they visit with their dogs. The next meeting is on Nov. 30. Call (910) 949-9953 for more details.

Angela North Zumwalt is the president of the Moore County Citizens’ Pet Responsibility Committee.