An Opportunity to Connect

HABIT is enriching lives every day throughout East Tennessee, and each of you are an important part of HABIT’s success! The HABIT Connection is an opportunity to share stories, pet-related info and upcoming events with you, our volunteer team, that make this program so very valuable to the communities that we serve. A big thanks to you and your pet for all that you do to bring smiles to people in need each and every week!

The HABIT Connection will be sent every other month, and we welcome your suggestions for this newsletter. Please send your ideas to kimschumpert@gmail.com. Looking forward to your feedback!

Happy Birthday HABIT… Celebrating 30 Years!

How far we have come…
In 1986, Ronald Reagan was President, the Iran-Contra Affair was planning out in the halls of Congress, and Americans watched the Space Shuttle Challenger explode on TV. Locally, the Tennessee Volunteers football team was coached for the 10th year by Coach Johnny Majors and had a record of 7-5.

Dr. John New from the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine and Dr. Ben Grainger from the University of Tennessee College of Social Work were inspired by the work of Dr. Leo Bustad. Dr. Bustad was with the Delta Society and had done work regarding the interaction between humans and animals. Dr. New & Dr. Grainger partnered to see what could be done to help people in Knoxville deal with the mental stress and pain that they were going through. This was the beginning of what became HABIT.

As the HABIT program began recruiting volunteers, the challenge was convincing local nursing homes that it was ok to let dogs into their facilities. The administration of the facilities voiced concerns ranging from fleas and ticks to zoonotic illness. One by one these concerns were addressed, and the facilities allowed a trial run. After 30 years, we still have volunteers in that first facility along with 160 additional facilities across East Tennessee.

Our volunteers started in Knoxville and now are serving the community in 20 East Tennessee counties. Over 550 volunteer teams can be found in facilities ranging from assisted living centers, memory care centers, and residential hospice along with Children’s Hospital and Juvenile Court. Our Ruff Reading program is one of our most popular placements with teams in classrooms from pre-K to 5th grade, and we have recently started work with school counselors.
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People often think that we only work with golden retrievers and labs, but our program has dogs of all sizes as well as cats and rabbits. While our HABIT animals may come in all shapes and sizes, they all have the heart to serve.

HABIT humans may be the rarest of all as they live to make others lives better and love to let their animal have the spotlight. They are ok with everyone knowing their animal’s name while not having any idea what their name is. HABIT humans realize how important their “job” is and dedicate hours to brushing, bathing, and training their pets to ensure a strong team.

It is because of our 550 HABIT humans, plus our 160 facilities and their staff, that our program continues to thrive. A special thank you to the those in the community that support HABIT through donations to ensure that we can continue to grow and run a high caliber program.

We look forward to the next 30 years, which includes research to increase our knowledge of the human-animal bond, as well as touching the lives of people in need and bringing a smile to their day.

Spotlight Team...

Joan Cohn, the Chair of the HABIT Board and an active volunteer for 25 years, shares her passion for the HABIT program with everyone she encounters! Joan became involved with HABIT after her mother was visited by a volunteer and has been paying it forward ever since. Macy, her 5 year old Cocker Spaniel, is a 3 year volunteer dog and Joan's 7th dog in the program.

When talking to Joan about her love of HABIT, she said, “the dog is the bridge for the conversation and helps to make their situation as normal and as happy as possible.” Joan monitors seven facilities and loves working with her volunteer teams so that they can experience the great joy that HABIT has brought her over the years. Joan explains, “Everyone wins with HABIT! It makes me feel great to share Macy with others and see how our visits bring a smile.” Joan also talks about how excited Macy gets driving into the parking lot for her volunteer work. I am sure many of you experience the same with your volunteer pet. We thank Joan and Macy for their dedication to HABIT and all the great work that they do!
Making an Impact for 25 Years!
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HABIT Breaking News…

HABIT is now an IAHAIO Member!
HABIT is proud to announce its acceptance as a full member of the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations (IAHAIO). With so many different “pet therapy” organizations out there, it’s difficult to know the difference between them, as they are not all created equal. There are certain organizations that set themselves apart by subscribing to a standard of excellence in practice and theory, and being a member of IAHAIO indicates this. IAHAIO is an international association that acts as an umbrella organization for high quality animal-assisted intervention programs located all over the world. As the only association of its kind, IAHAIO serves to provide leadership to advance the field of human-animal interaction through research, education, collaboration, and practice.

After a rigorous application process, HABIT was approved as a member in July 2016 to join the ranks of the 100 organizations located worldwide, being one of only 18 organizations in the U.S. HABIT is now connected with this prestigious community dedicated to advancing the field of HAI. This membership represents a significant advancement in HABIT’s 30 years of growth, as we are now recognized as an international leader in the field. Our affiliation with IAHAIO will allow us to foster professional relationships with other similar organizations around the world, to share best practices, and to collaborate in research and education opportunities. For more information, please visit www.iahaio.org.

SAVE the DATE: 30th Anniversary Celebrations!

Volunteer Appreciation Event:
Pet Safe Village and Dog Park, October 6 at 5:30pm.
A great opportunity to celebrate HABIT with volunteers & their pets…more details to follow! CLICK HERE TO RSVP!

Volunteer Appreciation Event:
Barley’s Taproom & Pizzeria (in the Old City), October 25 at 6pm.
An opportunity to meet and connect with other HABIT volunteers. Pizza will be provided…more details to follow! CLICK HERE TO RSVP!
FINAL THOUGHTS

REMINDER: Please ensure that your visits are being recorded and submitted to the HABIT office, so that we have accurate records of the great work you and your pet are doing!

YOUR SUPPORT: We appreciate all that you do to support HABIT with your time. If you want to provide additional support to our growth, you can donate online directly to HABIT by visiting tiny.utk.edu/CVMGIVE, choose HABIT (Human-Animal Bond in Tennessee) under the Public Health and Outreach section.

Contact HABIT - Human-Animal Bond In Tennessee

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HABIT is a program of the
University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine.