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Hospice of Orleans launches new “Pet Peace of Mind[®]” to Keep Pets and Families Together During Hospice Care.

Albion, New York –

“No one wants my dog,” a hospice patient said sadly to his nurse. A fall had made it necessary for him to move from home to the Martin-Linsin Hospice Residence where he could receive 24-hour care. Donna Coble, a per diem RN, had been providing him home care services for several months and knew him and his dog quite well. She knew that Denzel, a friendly long haired dachshund had been his constant companion for more than ten years and was the most important relationship in his life. A widower with no children, he frequently referred to Denzel as “Danny” or “my baby.” “They were the best of buddies,” Donna recalled with a smile. “Denzel would stay by his side all day.” Donna could hear the pain, fear and grief in her patient’s voice as he shared his fears concerning the long term care of Denzel. Troubled by her patient’s distress, Donna thought about the situation and decided, “I’ll take Denzel if no one in the family can take him.” She contacted her patient’s relatives who were relieved that she would take the dog as they were not in a position to care for him. “I’m not really a dog person but I have dogs and, well, I felt bad that he didn’t have anyone to take Denzel. He loved that dog so much and I loved them both so I decided I should take him.”

After Denzel came to live with her, Donna and her 11 year old daughter Julie brought him to visit at the Residence twice a week. “Who does he sleep with?” her patient had asked her on their first visit. “Well...he sleeps with me...I can’t believe I let a dog sleep with me.” Donna said with a smile.

“Denzel is 11 years old, that’s 77 in people years. It took him awhile to get used to the two other dogs in the household, a Puggle and a Pointer, and the cats and ducks. However, Denzel has now become the Alpha dog which is funny because it looks like he has no legs he’s so long and low to the ground.”

Donna took Denzel to visit at the Residence two days before his owner died. “‘Here’s my baby, here’s my baby’ he said as he hugged Denzel.” Donna recounted. “I really think Denzel knew that his daddy was leaving him and that he was going to live with me because he seemed sad and then he came and sat by my side. The nursing staff told me that his owner was very much happier and relieved to know that “his baby” was being taken care of and had a wonderful home on a farm. “

“I’m very happy that it worked out so well.” Donna said as she embraced Denzel. “I’m very happy his owner got to see him while he was in the Residence and before he passed on. To him Denzel was like his child. It made his last days better knowing that Denzel had a home.”

The story of Denzel and his owner illustrates the need for the new Pet Peace of Mind® program that Hospice of Orleans has launched this month. Pet Peace of Mind® allows people to complete their end of life journey without worrying about their pet’s current or future needs. This initiative provides volunteer pet care services for pet owners who are unable to care for their pets while receiving Hospice services. During the first year of operation, services will include: dog and cat care such as walking, playing and waste clean-up; transportation to a Veterinarian for medical care and check-ups; fostering; and providing assistance with pet care and pet exercise. Education and counseling for patients and their families will focus on understanding pet needs and behaviors and planning for the pet’s future.

The program aligns with the Hospice of Orleans mission to embrace those facing advanced illness with optimal levels of comfort, compassion, and expertise. Hospice works with the patient, doctor and family to craft a detailed plan that provides dignity, relief, and strength to those with a life-limiting illness, and support to the ones who love them, including pet companions.

“The exciting thing about this program is that it is in direct response to needs identified by our nursing and aide staff who often encounter situations such as those experienced by our patient and Denzel.” explained Mary Anne Fischer, Executive Director of Hospice of Orleans. “Every day we see the importance of pet-companions to the well-being of those receiving hospice services. Pets are allowed to visit in the Martin-Linsin Residence and pet therapy has been an integral part of our program for more than ten years. Our staff has long recognized the importance of the human-pet bond and has wanted to start a pet care program for some time. However, without independent funding, that has not been possible. Now, with start-up funding we are finally able to offer needed services and recruit volunteers to meet this important need.”

Pet Peace of Mind® is a national program developed and funded by the Banfield Charitable Trust. Hospice of Orleans is only the second hospice to start the program in New York State, placing it among a select group of hospice providers across the country that are ensuring this important patient need is met. “The human-pet bond is incredibly special. If we can help keep a patient and their pet together, we’ve accomplished what we set out to do,” said Dianne McGill, executive director and CEO of the Banfield Charitable Trust.

Volunteers are needed to help provide Pet Peace of Mind® services. Applications to be a Hospice of Orleans volunteer are available at <http://www.hospiceoforleans.org/index.php/how-you-can-help/volunteer-with-us> or by calling 585-589-5809.

Schools clubs and service groups are encouraged to contact Hospice of Orleans, Inc. to assist with fundraising for this important program.

“I hope many people in our community will volunteer to help out with the Pet Peace of Mind® Program. It will make such a big difference in the lives of our patients.” – Donna Coble.

Note: A photo release from Donna Coble is on file with Hospice of Orleans, Inc.

Photo 1: Denzel aka “Danny” a long haired dachshund

Photo 2: Donna Coble, Hospice RN with Denzel - “I love this little guy!”

Photo 3: Donna Coble - “I hope many people in our community will volunteer to help out with the Pet Peace of Mind® Program. It will make such a big difference in the lives of our patients.”