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April Pet Post Volunteer Acknowledgement

For the month of April, Team Pet Post would like to recognize Bette Mehlbrech for her volunteer efforts with the BARK (Beach Animals Reading with Kids) Program. BARK is an all-volunteer program that encourages children to increase their reading skills and self-confidence by reading aloud to certified therapy dogs.

Bette has been a loyal volunteer with the BARK Program since its inception in 2007, and she and her companion Rusti has provided their services to elementary students of three schools with a profound sense of patience and reliability.



Bette and her Golden Retriever, Rusti started with BARK providing reading services for the children of the Bryant and Roosevelt Elementary School. Later, the team worked with the children at Buffum Elementary School until the campus closed June 2011. Today, Bette and Rusti participate with the BARK program allowing children the opportunity to read to Rusti every week at the Holmes Elementary School of Lakewood, California.

Bette says she enjoys being a BARK member because she feels like the volunteer work she provides to the students is a positive outlet not just herself, but for her dog Rusti. She is a very sociable companion and she loves to keep the children company as they read. "One of the greatest parts of the program is that when you're reading along with the kids, they almost seem to forget they're doing something they used to hate to do," said Bette. "I'm not going to judge the students, and neither is Rusti or any of the other BARK dogs. The therapy dogs are just there to love, so it's really an overall positive experience for everybody. We enjoy every minute of it."

Bette's contribution to the organization goes far beyond the classroom setting. Not only do Bette and Rusti listen to the children read, they have visited each classroom at Holmes Elementary to educate the students about therapy dogs, and how they can properly care for their own pets at home. Bette has also been accredited by the organization for her contribution to produce a majority of the BARK Program's training manual. If that wasn't enough, and after being diagnosed with cancer; while undergoing chemotherapy treatments, Bette kept up with in-home tutoring services and continued reading with the program's students.



When asked about her most memorable experience volunteering with BARK readers, Bette recalled an occasion with a troubled boy. Every Friday if the boy behaved during the week he was allowed to read along with Rusti. If the child misbehaved he wasn't allowed to read with Rusti. The child would become very upset with himself and work hard to behave so that he wouldn't miss out on any more visits. "It was just such a touching and memorable experience to see that little boy work to better himself and his behavior," said Bette. "I've read with many students over the years, but seeing that boy work so hard on himself to read with Rusti really touched my heart."

Because of Bette's display of dedication and loyalty to her students in the BARK Program, The Pet Post recognizes Bette for her services and presents her with The Pet Post volunteer recognition award for the month of April.

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