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SENIOR ADVOCATE**



The Importance of Pets

It was a cold and blustery morning and Norma was feeling it in her bones. If asked, the elderly woman would say that she could tell the weather by the stiffness in her joints. “It’s going to rain,” she would say “and it’ll be a cold one, too.” When the knock came both Norma and her old Golden Retriever, Sam, got to their feet. They knew exactly who was calling.

“Hello Norma! Are you ready for lunch?” Dale’s warm and outgoing personality reminded Norma of how life used to be – busy and full of activities with family and friends. For the past two years Dale had delivered Norma her Meals on Wheels lunch everyday, at the same time, and always with a cheerful smile. Norma looked forward to seeing Dale and so did old Sam. Dale spent a few minutes chatting and also took time to loosen up the wrapping on the meal. He knew that on a day like today it would be hard for Norma to do herself - with her arthritis and all. Sam stood close by - he knew lunch was coming - and not just for Norma.

In 2002 the SPCA for Monterey County learned that clients of the Meals on Wheels program were sharing the delivered meals with their pets. This meant that the senior was not getting their much-needed nutrients and their pets were consuming food meant for people, also not a healthy option. “A beloved pet is often the primary source of comfort and companionship for people with medical or age-related challenges. Yet for those who are physically impaired or on fixed incomes, it can be a struggle,” says Susan Koza, Director of Development at the SPCA.

The collaboration between The SPCA and Meals on Wheels expanded to include Meals on Wheels of the Salinas Valley and the organizations now serve Pet Meals to 65 people and their 129 pets. The program is funded by donations. Best Pets in Pacific Grove and The Feed Trough in Salinas sell food and supplies at cost to The SPCA for the program.

Research has shown that pet ownership can offer significant health benefits, especially for older adults who live alone. Pet owners have lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol levels and, in general, suffer fewer ailments and have less difficulty sleeping. Dog owners in particular, exercise more.



The importance of having pets has not escaped Margarite Alvarez, CEO of Calif.-based Choice Home Health Care. While there is no formal arrangement in place with her staff of in-home caregivers, Ms. Alvarez encourages them to help clients care for their pets and, if a client is forced to move to a nursing facility, it is not uncommon for a caregiver to take care of the pet until their owner returns home. Ms. Alvarez has noticed a trend that people are choosing to remain at home with their pets rather than going into assisted living where their pets are not always welcome.

Norma sat in the living room that she had shared with her late husband for over 52 years and looked out over the garden. Sam, always seeming to know when she may need comforting, gently placed his head in her lap.

Liza Horvath has over 25 years experience in the estate planning and trust fields and is a Trust Officer with a local bank. The above should not be considered legal or medical advice.

If you have a question please call (831) 915-0272 or email liza@montereytrust.com.