

Group finds homes for pets of hospitalized owners

Pets N Patients in Naperville provides housing, care during temporary absences



Ann Marie Schrage-Glaviano of Naperville holds her papillon, Dandy, which she adopted while running her nonprofit organization Pets N Patients. (Gary Gibula, Special to the Tribune / September 3, 2013)

By Gary Gibula, Special to the Tribune

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What happens when a pet owner faces a hospital stay and has no one to care for a four-legged friend?

Moved by her love of animals, Ann Marie Schrage-Glaviano of Naperville runs a nonprofit organization that locates caregivers to look after pets for people who have no other options or cannot afford the cost of a kennel.

Pets N Patients is the one-person operation Schrage-Glaviano started around 2005, inspired by her own experience while being treated for a serious illness.

In 2000, doctors told Schrage-Glaviano she had proliferative glomerulonephritis, a form of lupus that had targeted both of her kidneys. Throughout her chemotherapy treatments, which led to a remission of the

disease, she continually relied on others to take care of her dog, three cats, two rabbits, three guinea pigs and four exotic birds.

Her efforts to start the referral agency suffered an ironic twist when her beloved dog, a papillon she named Medici, was diagnosed with canine lupus and died of a blood clot.

"I was devastated," Schrage-Glaviano said. "Medici stayed with me the whole time throughout my illness. A dog can give you unconditional love, and you cannot substitute for that with anything else."

The mother of two previously had been very active as a community volunteer, founding an after-school conservation organization for children, being a trustee of the Willowbrook Wildlife Foundation and working a full-time career in administration for an exhibit company.

Thanks to the advice and encouragement of trusted friends and the pro bono help of attorney Jeffrey Shuman, Pets N Patients got off the ground and gained nonprofit status in 2007. She organized volunteers at meetings "for people with a need, to do house checks on a cat or a dog while someone was sick and in the hospital."

Today, Pets N Patients is a virtual agency with a referral process that begins at a website.

"The first thing is we ask is for a patient to fill out the application form," Schrage-Glaviano said. "We also need pictures of their dog so we can show a prospective caregiver what the pet looks like."

In addition to its website, the agency utilizes social media, with more than 6,000 Facebook friends, she said.

"I posted a need on the page of Chicago dog walker concierge service Pawlosophy, and Alexis Hamm [Pawlosophy business operations manager] and some others simply volunteered their services to come by three times a day to help a slight little old lady who was a shut-in," she said.

Pets N Patients always is looking for caregivers who can look after a pet for a few days to a few weeks, Schrage-Glaviano said.

"We had a man who'd just gone through heart surgery who wanted to return the kindness we'd shown him and care for another person's dog," said Schrage-Glaviano. "He said 'I wasn't supposed to live, so now I want to return the kindness.'"

With the current cost of boarding a medium-sized dog at an area kennel starting at around \$30 per night, the money can add up during longer hospital stay. Pets N Patients asks a \$100 donation, regardless of the number of days needed. All donations are tax-deductible.

"A lot is based on disclosure from a patient, and we respect their privacy," said Schrage-Glaviano. "If it's OK with the patient, we'll start a chip-in fund on Twitter or Facebook where family and friends can donate to help out. I tell everyone that we are people-powered and love-driven."

Schrage-Glaviano is looking into finding a place where she can board dogs herself. She found an ideal facility in Steger, but the \$375,000 purchase price is too steep for a nonprofit organization with an annual budget of \$17,000.

"Our funding comes from donations of individuals as well as a few businesses and corporations like BMW, which has helped for the last two years," Schrage-Glaviano said. "But human resources are the bigger donation. When people agree to look after someone's pet at a time of crisis, what they're giving are incredible acts of service."

"I'm not a licensed dog rescue or adoption agency," Schrage-Glaviano said. "I just want to be a Band-Aid for a patient to get from the hospital bed to back home."