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## Seniors on the go get together at yearly expo

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Dylan Slagle/Staff Photo

Rosina Greensfelder, of Westminster, gets a smooch from Meeko, a Chihuahua, at the Brightview Westminster Ridge booth while visiting the sixth annual Seniors on the Go Expo at the Carroll County Agriculture Center in Westminster Wednesday. Meeko is a therapy dog with Keystone Pet Enhanced Therapy Services, whose animals regularly visit residents at Brightview Westminster Ridge.



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By Brandon Oland, Times Staff Writer | 0 comments

Most weeks, Brightview Westminster Ridge senior residents receive two special visitors.

They are covered with fur, walk on four legs, crave attention and adore treats.

Gully, a Shih Tzu, and Raisin, a border collie, regularly delight the seniors at the Westminster senior care facility. The dogs are part of Keystone Pet Enhanced Therapy Services, one of the exhibitors at the Seniors on the Go Expo at the Carroll County Agriculture Center's Shipley Arena in Westminster Wednesday.

KPETS dogs frequent assisted living facilities throughout southern Pennsylvania and Central Maryland. Many of those canines were on hand to greet visitors to the expo Wednesday.

Even in a loud, raucous setting with belly dancers and cloggers taking the stage, Gully and Raisin remained calm and stayed focused on the smiling seniors who stopped to rub their heads. Their easygoing temperaments make them ideal for retirement home visits, said Carol Murray, Gully's owner.

"As you can see, noises don't bother them," she said while Gully greeted visitors alongside the other KPETS dogs on hand.

Nancy Morris, of Upperco, is Raisin's owner. She brings her 6-year-old border collie to retirement homes throughout the area.

Occasionally, Gully and Raisin will team up and dance together. Both dogs have gone through extensive agility training.

Murray said Gully, an active dog who does not usually relish being held, allowed a wheelchair-bound senior at Westminster Ridge to hold him for 20 minutes Wednesday.

"He doesn't even let me hold him like that," she said.

KPETs dogs consist of many different breeds coming in many different shapes and sizes. Meeko, a 3-year-old Chihuahua, was the tiniest dog on hand Wednesday. Wendi Mitzel, of Hanover, Pa., is Meeko's owner. She said she trained Meeko from an early age to be calm around people. She said she wanted Meeko to go against the stereotype that all Chihuahuas yelp and bark frequently.

When Meeko opened his mouth Wednesday, it was to yawn, not bark. He licked the faces of well-wishers throughout the morning.

Mitzel, a registered nurse, said she noticed how excited seniors got when dogs visited a retirement home she worked at. She said she decided that she wanted to combine her love for dogs and her love of providing service.

"It seemed like a natural connection," she said.

Mitzel and Meeko travel throughout the area providing seniors who could not take their pets to their retirement homes a chance to play with an animal.

"It's impossible to fill all the requests," said Jo Kendig, who does visits with her dog, Spriggans.

The dog handlers said the organization is looking for pet owners willing to volunteer for the organization. The next orientation near Carroll is from 9 a.m. to noon Nov. 6 at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Hanover, Pa. Interested participants should register by e-mailing [konnections@kpets.org](mailto:konnections@kpets.org).

Mitzel said a dog can brighten the day of a senior. She's seen it firsthand.

"There are so many benefits," she said. "A dog loves you unconditionally."

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