



**FURRY FRIEND** — Chris Bordner and Popsicle visit the residents of The Manor at Perry Village on Thursdays. (Liz Dudley photo)

## Popsicle's one cool cat

### Therapy pets bring smiles to residents at The Manor

◆ By **LIZ DUDLEY**  
*Staff Writer*

When Popsicle rolls down the halls at The Manor at Perry Village in New Bloomfield, he gets lots of comments, which is naturally enough if you're a huge creamsicle-colored cat with a red bowtie riding on a wheelchair.

Popsicle is a therapy cat. His partner is Chris Bordner of Duncannon and each Thursday morning they visit residents at the nursing facility.

On Tuesdays, Bordner and her dog Helga, a 1 1/2-year-old long-haired German shepherd, visit Stonebridge Health and Rehab Center in Penn Twp.

Both of Bordner's pets are certified Keystone Pet-Enhanced Therapy Services ani-

mals. Popsicle (one of only three cats with KPETS certification) was adopted from Angel Pets, a local rescue group.

At 20 pounds, Popsicle is a standout, but it's his sweet and loving personality that captures residents' hearts. "Everyone knows the pets' names but very, very few know mine," Bordner said. "At Stonebridge, (activity director) Linda Staron put a note on the community board saying 'Chris and Helga coming today.' When I showed up, everyone knew Helga ... but they were disappointed that I turned out to be Chris because they thought Chris was another dog. I'm just the body that gets the pets to the facility."

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# Cool cat

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The requirements to be registered as a therapy pet team are: Dog must know basic commands, be well-socialized, adaptable, get along with other animals/strangers, tolerate touching of ears, tail, feet and tight hugs, be comfortable around wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, etc.

Cats need to be social, sit nicely on a lap or pillow (or ride in a wheelchair like Popsicle) and tolerate strange surroundings and being touched or held.

All pets need to be current with their vaccinations and annual physical exams. They must pass a behavioral assessment/evaluation from both a KPETS therapy evaluator and the pet's own veterinarian.

The handler must attend an orientation. Then, at least two

on-site visitation evaluations are required. There also is a yearly \$25 registration for insurance.

Bordner and her family moved to Perry County when she was 11, and she's been here ever since. She's married with a grown son, and has worked in retail, offices and in Web site design. She also has been a volunteer in many capacities. "I was a sign language interpreter at religious conventions for a while."

After she married, she and her family raised dogs, chickens, ducks, goats and rabbits. "Raising animals properly helps build responsibility and even tenderness for others," she said.

She's always had a love and understanding for animals. "I loved to watch Walt Disney shows on Sunday and, in particular, I appreciated the docu-

mentaries on service dog training. At a very young age it became a heart's desire to train dogs for those in need, but the opportunity never arose."

She thought dog therapy might be something she could do someday. "I've had various dogs and cats, but recently two of them seemed to exhibit the personality needed for such work," she said. "Helga had a more party-girl personality, and with the help of Linda Staron we were welcomed into Stonebridge to become familiar with the sounds and signs of a nursing home environment."

Bordner also did lots of research on how to train a therapy dog.

As Helga was progressing in her visits at Stonebridge, "I thought, well, what about one of my four cats. The biggest one,

Popsicle, is also the most laid-back and social of the bunch. So I approached Rhonda Snyder of Perry Village to see if we could test the waters with Popsicle. He was a hit with the residents."

Bordner's sold on animals and the things they can do for people. "The emotional and health benefits animals bring to our lives are priceless. Seeing people's expressions change from a sad frown to tears of joy is priceless.

"For just that moment, nothing else matters, no age awareness, the pain seems less, the problems aren't important," she continued. "I feel strongly that no one should be deprived of the company and benefit of pets and that motivates me to keep visiting with my exceptional pets, to share the joy of having them and the pleasure of their company."