

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT For Karen Gerth, pet therapy is golden

BY MARTY CRISP  
Sunday News Staff Writer  
mcrisp@lnpnews.com

Karen Gerth remembers doing one of those personality tests that asks, "If you could be a dog, what kind of dog would you be?"

"I came out a Saint Bernard," she said. "Something about rescuing others. But I think I should be a golden retriever. I'm not too prissy, not too tough, and just a little bit silly."

Goldens are a favorite of Gerth, the founder of KPETS, Keystone Pet Enhanced Therapy Services. The 1972 Ephrata High School grad lives in Akron with her husband, Bill; two parrots; two quarter horses; and three golden retrievers, Cindy, Sammy and a three-legged pooch called Tripod. She also has a son, Jeremy Smith, 36, and a stepdaughter, Becca, 17.

"I wanted to give something back to the community," said Gerth, who works in the computer programming department at Brethren Village. "I tried becoming a Big Sister; I tried raising an assistance dog. But those things weren't my calling. When I found out about pet therapy, I started a small group at my church, The Worship Center in Leola, and we did pet visits. We called it 3CPO [Caring Christians and Canine Pet Organization]."

"But so many people outside the church were interested in participating and so many facilities were interested in having therapy dog visits that we pursued our own corporation with nonprofit status."

"KPETS [www.kpets.org] was born in 2003. We have more than 120 registered dog/handler teams serving 75 facilities in Lancaster and four surrounding counties. There are so many lives we can touch, so many smiles we can deliver, but it is hard to keep up



Jeff Ruppenthal/SUNDAY NEWS

**Karen Gerth is surrounded by her golden retrievers/therapy dogs, from left, Sammy, Cindy and Tripod.**

with on a part-time, volunteer basis."

**Where can people see KPETS dog/handler teams?** We appeared at the Farm Show this year at the "Discover What Dogs Can Do" learning station. We also do community talks to groups like Lions Clubs, senior centers, scout troops, and this month, at a Penn State physicians' panel. Our annual fundraising dinner will be held May 17 at Felicita Resort in Harrisburg. Jay Stutz from Animal Planet's "Good Dog U" is guest speaker and everyone is welcome to come.

**What's with KPETS' three-legged dog? Tripod, better known as Podley, was born with his umbilical chord wrapped around his leg, so the circulation was completely cut off. The limb actually dried up and fell off, leaving Pod with a stump. Pod loves to do KPETS activities, especially at Abraxas Academy, a juvenile**

detention facility in Morgantown.

**If I were rich:** KPETS would expand to a full-time, paid staff and a big facility that would include therapeutic riding and all kinds of animal assistance.

**My favorite entertainer:** Air Bud.

**My idea of exercise:** Long walks with the dogs.

**When you open my refrigerator, you'll always find:** Pickles from Martin's Country Store.

**My most satisfying extravagance:** Our six-acre property with room for horses.

**For a really good vacation, try:** Lake Powell on a house boat.

**Lancaster County's greatest asset:** Its farms.

**One thing that's wrong with Lancaster County:** It's the tie between overdevelopment and puppy mills — seeing things as commodities.

**If I could have dinner with anyone in the world, I'd invite:**

Jesus. Wouldn't that knock your socks off?!

**I can't help but laugh when:** Our parrot, Rocky, mimics the sound of a loud burp.

**The most notable trait I inherited:** Two different colored eyes: one brown and one green.

**The thing about dogs is:** They are nonjudgmental, forgiving, and never in a bad mood. They make us feel like a million bucks when we come home, and they connect us back to nature.

**My advice to somebody just starting out in life:** Find your passion. ■

## AROUND PENNSYLVANIA

### Multimillion-dollar record bid a fake

A winning bid of \$3 million for a huge record collection offered by a Ross Township man through eBay has turned out to be fraudulent, a newspaper reported Saturday.

An agent for the sale, J. Paul Henderson, said he was notified by an eBay executive Friday night that the bid was not legitimate and that the bidder's account had been suspended, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported.

An alleged buyer had won the online auction, claiming he would shell out \$3,002,150 for the collection of nearly 3 million vinyl albums, singles and CDs.

But an Irish man whose screen name appeared with the winning bid said he was unaware of the bid until after it had been entered and that he had been a victim of identity theft.

### Woman charged with homicide in fire

An Allentown woman has been charged with starting an apartment fire that killed an elderly man and left 22 people homeless.

Police say 42-year-old Holly Ann Applegate was staying in the same apartment as the 82-year-old victim and several others. The 2:30 a.m. blaze last Sunday also injured a firefighter.

Applegate is being held without bail in Lehigh County on homicide, arson and other charges after her arrest Friday. It was not immediately clear if she had a lawyer.

### Confidentiality laws may be loosened

Caught in a fragmented health care system, addicts in Pennsylvania can become frustrated in their journey toward recovery. That's the message Gov. Ed Rendell's administration says it has been hearing from patients who wrestle with drug or alcohol abuse while suffering from mental illness or chronic diseases such as diabetes.

The administration's proposed solution — a set of Health Department rule changes undergoing a lengthy review — is to provide a wider range of information to insurers, governments and other entities that pay for health care.

But some lawmakers, drug and alcohol treatment providers, and the state bar association argue loosening the regulations is tantamount to letting insurers eavesdrop on patient-counselor conversations.

### Philadelphia news building being sold

A development firm plans to buy the iconic newspaper building that houses Philadelphia's two major dailies.

Patriot Equities of Wayne may add retail stores while leasing back some space to the The Philadelphia Inquirer and Philadelphia Daily News.

Philadelphia Media is selling the white skyscraper to pay off debt from its \$515 million purchase of the papers in 2006.

Patriot president Erik Kolar expects the deal to close within three months. Philadelphia Media says it won't comment on terms or other aspects of the sale until an agreement has been signed.

From our wire services

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