

## New Initiative Unleashes 'Power of Paws'

**Hundreds nationwide join the effort by telling their "tails."**

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Renee takes her therapy cat, Pumpkin, to visit people in nursing homes and children with disabilities. When it comes to achieving long-term health, pets might be giving personal trainers a run for their money. Helping pets and people get healthy together is the heart of a new national initiative called Power of Paws.

The program is all about touting the health benefits of owning a pet, as well as making contributions toward pet assistance research. A variety of pet partners united in the effort to educate pet owners about the human-animal bond and encourage people to get active, reduce stress and live healthier together.

"Studies show there are significant physical, mental and emotional benefits for both pets and pet parents," said Bill Pearce, chief marketing officer for Del Monte Foods, the lead program partner. "It's as easy as taking your dog for a walk. Researchers say you'll walk farther with your pet than you would if you were walking alone — an activity that benefits you both."

Sue's rescued Golden Retriever, Gracie, gives her the motivation to stay active. One way to get pet owners involved in the movement is through the Power of Paws website, where people can share their stories about how their pets have changed their lives. Hundreds of stories have been shared — from therapy cats who visit nursing homes to dogs that assist those with disabilities — detailing people's personal experiences of emotional and physical recovery with help from their pets.

A shelter volunteer, a Vietnam veteran and a man with a traumatic brain injury are among those who have told their "tails." Another inspiring story is that of Renee, who takes her therapy cat, Pumpkin, to visit people in nursing homes and children with disabilities. Renee tells how on a recent visit to a nursing home, a woman sat with Pumpkin and proclaimed, "God must have known I needed this today."

For every story that's posted, a dollar goes to a charity partner, including Animal Medical Center in New York City, Animal Friends in Pittsburgh, Pa., and Bergin University for Canine Studies in Santa Rosa, Calif.

To further educate consumers about the health benefits of pets, Power of Paws is supporting a new show on Discovery Health channel called "Pets and People: The Power of the Health Connection." Encore airings of the show are scheduled through September on these dates at 9 a.m. EST: Aug. 19, Aug. 30 and Sept. 6.

Health benefits by way of furry friends

Heart patients are nearly five times more likely to survive a heart attack than those without pets.<sup>1</sup> Pets can help humans combat loneliness, depression and other emotional problems — even something as common as stress.<sup>2</sup> Cholesterol and triglyceride levels are lower in pet owners than in non-owners.<sup>3</sup>

1. Ontario Veterinary Medical Association
2. Generations, vol. XXV, no. 2, Summer 2001; New York Times, July 24, 2001
3. Delta Society/Anderson, 1990