

## Pet Partners Pet of the Year Talking Points

- Pet Partners Pet of the Year takes place February 5 – March 18.
- Pet Partners Pet of the Year is a six-week fundraising competition. Funds raised support the Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program.
- 2024 is the third year for the event.
- There is no fee to participate; however, the pet who raises the most money through fundraising will be crowned the winner. Pet parents and other supporters will be rewarded through incentive prize levels:
  - Raise \$75 to earn a pet bandana.
  - Raise \$250 to earn the commemorative polo shirt, plus the pet bandana.
  - Raise \$250 or more to earn prizes at higher levels.
- Goals for the 2024 Pet of the Year competition:
  - 42 pet candidates;
  - More than 300 pet parents and supporters;
  - Raise \$92,000 to support the Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program.
- You can nominate your own pet or someone else's pet to compete for Pet of the Year.
- Nominations open on December 15 and will be accepted through February 15.
- Fundraising begins on February 5 and will end at 11:59 p.m. CT on March 18.
- Friends, family, and other supporters can register as part of your pet candidate's fundraising team. A team is made up of one or more people who are working together to reach out to their network on behalf of their pet candidate.
- Pet Partners Pet of the Year is inclusive of all pets. Candidates do not have to be one of the nine species we register or a registered therapy animal team to participate, however, if a candidate is a therapy animal, they should be registered with Pet Partners.
- There are many downloadable materials, templates, and printables found on the fundraising website under the Tools & Resources tab. There are also virtual kick-offs to learn more about competing and setting up your pet's fundraising page.
- The 2023 Pet of the Year winner was Rye Guy, who raised nearly \$15,000 to support the Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program. Rye and Lindsey are a registered therapy animal team who love visiting children between the ages of 7 and 17 at Mayo Clinic, including the patients and their families flying into Rochester (MN) International Airport. In his spare time, Rye loves to do tricks and compete in agility competitions.
  - 2nd place was Doc Snuggles who raised more than \$9,800.

- 3rd place was Mika the Chow Pei who raised nearly \$6,000.
- The 2022 Pet of the Year was Happy Happy Hazel, who raised more than \$33,000 to support the Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program. Hazel and Sara have been a registered therapy animal team since 2018, making more than 350 visits with over 1,000 hours of volunteer time logged.
- Sponsorship opportunities with marketing benefits start at \$5,000 for Pet Partners Pet of the Year.
- To nominate a pet or to learn more about the fundraising competition, visit [petpartners.org/petoftheyear](https://petpartners.org/petoftheyear).
- We have an active presence on social media and links to our channels can be found on our website.

### General Pet Partners Talking Points

- Pet Partners' mission is to improve human health and well-being through the human-animal bond. The human-animal bond is a mutually beneficial relationship that improves the physical, social, and emotional lives of those we serve, and should benefit the animals as well.
- Our volunteer therapy animal teams make millions of visits each year in support of our mission. A therapy animal team is one human handler and one animal working together to make visits in their community.
- Our domestic Therapy Animal Program is available in all 50 U.S. states and in Canada. Our international program is available in more than a dozen countries across four continents.
- Most Pet Partners therapy animals are dogs (92% of total registrations), but we also register domestic cats, equines (horses & donkeys), rabbits, guinea pigs, domestic rats, birds (parrots & pigeons), miniature pigs, and llamas & alpacas as therapy animals.
- Pet Partners teams visit at a wide variety of facilities, including hospitals and other healthcare, senior living, schools and libraries, veterans' health facilities, court systems, airport and transit facilities, university campuses, and many more. Therapy animal teams are welcomed at many places where interactions with an animal can benefit human health and well-being.
- Due to the variety of places we visit and people we serve, Pet Partners strives to recruit a diverse array of volunteers into our program that represent this variety. Unique perspectives and experiences increase our cultural competence and capacity for allyship, which helps expand our reach and strengthen our impact.
- Our preferred terminology is "registered" rather than "certified." *Certification* requires assessment by an independent authority and currently this doesn't exist in the volunteer therapy animal field. *Registration* means teams meet the requirements of the Pet Partners program. Our goal is to be transparent about the expectations someone should have when participating in our program.

- A good therapy animal has an affinity for interacting with people, a calm temperament, and reliable behaviors. A therapy animal handler will have a strong bond with their therapy animal, and be able to read and interpret their animal's body language and advocate for the animal's welfare. Therapy animals don't need specific training other than basic obedience and leash skills. The animal's personality and the bond with the handler are the most important elements.
- Our Therapy Animal Program includes some specific program initiatives:
  - Animal-Assisted Crisis Response (AACR), which prepares teams to support people affected by traumatic events.
  - Animal-Assisted Workplace Well-being (AAWW), which supports employee well-being and morale.
  - Read With Me™, which promotes literacy through reading to therapy animals.
  - Walk With Me™, which promotes movement for health and well-being.
- Pet Partners also promotes Animal-Related Engagement (ARE), which is any engagement opportunity that provides the benefits of the human-animal bond by encouraging feelings that are commonly associated with interaction with an animal. This can include things such as animal-related videos, crafts, and toys. Virtual visits, which became popular during COVID-19 restrictions, are another example of ARE.
- For more information, please visit our website at [petpartners.org](https://petpartners.org).

### **Interview & Media Tips**

- Discussion of activities and initiatives should focus on Pet Partners program-level activities and initiatives, such as the overall purpose of Pet Partners teams, Read With Me and Walk With Me, AACR training and deployment, and Animal-Related Engagement. If you or your group are involved with some specific local activities, please make clear during interviews that these are specific to you/your group, not to Pet Partners as a whole.
- For safety and liability reasons, as well as to ensure the well-being of our volunteers and animals, Pet Partners visits may not exceed two hours per day, in total. This includes media events.
- Costumes other than seasonal scarves are not permitted while visiting or during media events. There are several reasons for this, including safety, professionalism, and allowing clients to directly touch and interact with the therapy animal. We ask that you refrain from discussing any visits or stories that involve the use of a costume on an animal or handler, regardless of whether a Pet Partners team was involved.