

IHMs in Action



Sister Dorothy (Marcianna) Joyce, IHM, (left) enjoys visiting with Egypt and Sister Patrice.

All the while Patrice Marie Selby, IHM, was active in ministry, she knew she wanted to raise an assistance dog when she retired.

But she didn't wait for retirement. While still working as a chaplain in an alcohol and drug treatment center in Florida, she raised and trained a golden retriever named Davey. He came to live with her when he was seven weeks old and went to work with her every day during the two years of his training.

"I saw him break through client barriers, where I had been unsuccessful," Sister Patrice recalls. "Although Davey was being trained as a service dog, I saw his value as a therapy dogs with clients.

"His wagging tail, soft fur and friendliness created an atmosphere for even the most reluctant client to become involved in his or her treatment. In fact, after Davey left to begin his

'career' as a service dog, the chemical dependency agency adopted one of his littermates to be a therapy dog."

While service dogs provide 24/7 service to those with physical disabilities, therapy dogs provide comfort to people in hospitals, retirement homes, nursing homes or mental institutions and to those in stressful situations.

When Sister Patrice retired to the IHM Motherhouse in 2007, she knew her next ministry would be to develop a program for therapy dogs to visit residents in the Motherhouse Health Care Center (HCC).

Her timing could not have been better. The HCC was being licensed by the State of Michigan as a nursing home, and instituting a therapy dog program was one of the recommendations.

Working with a committee, Sister Patrice created guidelines for a pet therapy program at the Motherhouse that meets state and national standards. She trained Egypt, an English spaniel owned by a cousin of one of the IHM Sisters. Sister Patrice and Egypt achieved certification from Therapy Dogs, Inc.

Soon they were joined by Sister Josephine (Joecile) McNamara, IHM, and Tobias (a golden retriever), Sister Loretta (Vincent DePaul) Schroeder and Spike* (a miniature pinscher mix) and an occasional volunteer from outside the IHM community.

"We have flyers on all the nursing floors to let people know about the program," says Sister Patrice. "The dogs even come with business cards residents can put on their doors to let us know they'd like a visit.

"The program has been very well-received," she notes. "When the 'animal therapists' come into their rooms, the sisters' eyes light up. They smile and pet the dog as he or she snuggles in. Some even encourage the dog to climb into their laps.

"We know first-hand what an incredible job the dogs do, providing comfort, joy and unqualified affection for residents. In return, the dogs have a job they love and can hardly wait to get to work when they come to the Motherhouse. It's a real win-win situation."

**Spike was part of the therapy dog program until her recent, unexpected death.*