

MY FAVORITE AUDIENCE IS A DOG

Bideawee Launches Reading to Dogs, a Dog Therapy Program Helping Children with Reading Challenges

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New York, NY-11/5/2007- Who could be a better audience than a dog? A dog's physical ability to hear is at least 100 times stronger than a human's and a dog will never judge or criticize you. The dog will listen politely and most likely embrace you with kisses when your performance is over.

Bideawee, one of the oldest humane organizations in the country, found this combination of dogs and humans very compelling and recently launched its new *Reading to Dogs* program. The basic premise of this unusual program is that reading out loud to a dog creates a more relaxing and less threatening atmosphere for children for whom reading is a challenge. Teachers and parents have quickly noticed the drastic improvements in the children's literacy and self-esteem.

Currently 13 public elementary schools and several libraries on Long Island, NY participate in Bideawee's *Reading to Dogs* program. All dogs participating in this volunteer-supported program are specially trained Bideawee therapy dogs.

The children have one-on-one sessions with the dog, reading aloud books with mostly animal themes. Bideawee volunteers serve as interested, non-judgmental listeners, gently coaching the children when appropriate, as well as encouraging their dogs to focus on the child and the book. The volunteers can also ask the child to "explain to Rover" the meaning of a difficult word or to relate the meaning of the story to the dog. This technique often enables a child to feel more relaxed in their responses than they do in the usual class setting.

Lisa, a second grade student on Long Island, is looking forward to her *Reading to Dogs* sessions.

She said, "Thank you so much for letting me read to your dogs. I love dogs and I like to read more now. I had fun reading to your lovely dogs. I have a basset hound that I read to all the time and she licks the book after I finished reading."

About Bideawee

Founded in 1903 by Mrs. Flora D'Auby Jenkins Kibbe, Bideawee, which means "stay a while" in Scottish, is one of the oldest humane organizations in the United States. Bideawee's three locations in New York, Wantagh, and Westhampton is home to approximately 350 to 500 animals at any time and place thousands of dogs, cats, puppies and kittens in loving homes every year. The organization operates two full service veterinary practices in Manhattan and Westhampton and is also home to two of the oldest and largest Pet Memorial Parks in the country located in Wantagh and Westhampton, NY.

Bideawee's Learning Centers in all three locations provide a wide range of educational programs and fun activities that help strengthen the bond between people and pets. Our mission is to promote and support safe, loving, long-term relationships between people and companion animals by providing a continuum of services and programs that are innovative, personalized and of high quality.

Bideawee is a not-for-profit 501 (c) 3 humane organizations and 100 % of Bideawee's funding comes from private sources. For more information, please visit www.bideawee.org.

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Bideawee's Wantagh Program

As of May 2007 the Wantagh Education & Volunteer Department has held over thirty *Reading to Dogs* group events in public libraries on Long Island, and has run *Reading to Dogs* remediation programs in eleven Nassau County public schools and two Suffolk County schools. The pet therapy volunteers arrive with their dogs, which have been bathed, groomed, and in some cases, "dressed" for the occasion. The children have one-on-one sessions with the dog, reading aloud books with mostly animal themes. Our volunteers serve as interested, non-judgmental listeners, gently coaching the children when appropriate, as well as encouraging their dogs to focus on the child and the book. The volunteers can also ask the child to "explain to Rover" the meaning of a difficult word or to relate the meaning of the story to the dog. This technique often enables a child to feel more relaxed in their responses than they do in the usual class setting. The feedback from teachers and parents has been very positive and enthusiastic.

Bideawee's *Reading to Dogs* program expands our well-established pet therapy program into the role of helping children improve their reading skills while it fosters a love of reading.

The basic premise of this innovative program is that reading out loud to a dog creates a more relaxing and less threatening atmosphere for children for whom reading is a challenge. In addition, reading to a dog creates an environment that is unique and fun for most children, and helps send the message that reading can be an enjoyable, relaxing, and worthwhile activity.