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Oscar is not a grouch to senior citizens

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT
The Herald

Oscar is a name associated with the grouch on Sesame Street. But to seniors at the Bennett Centre in Georgetown, Oscar is a golden beacon of light, bringing love and happiness into their lives.

This Oscar is a seven-year-old Golden Retriever-Lab cross who along with his owner, Deborah Newell of Georgetown, make weekly visits to their friends at the Bennett Centre.

It's obvious that Oscar and Ms. Newell enjoy the Tuesday night visits as much as the residents. Oscar spends the night gambolling from person to person, earning a pat here and giving a nuzzle there.

While Oscar keeps busy with the doting affection of the seniors, Ms. Newell is passing around home-baked cookies, presenting a birthday cake to help celebrate a residents birthday or just chatting with the residents about every-day things.

It's more like a family reunion than a visit, which is exactly the way Oscar and Ms. Newell like it.

"I feel so close to these people, they have so much to give," said Ms. Newell. "Oscar and I get as much from them as they've told me they get from us."

A perfect symbiotic relationship is what has developed from its initial inception almost four years ago when Ms. Newell acquired the dog from a neighbor who no longer wanted Oscar.

A keen lover of animals, Ms. Newell couldn't resist Oscar's affectionate nature but soon found the dogs' constant need for affection

overwhelming.

"I think he had been very starved for affection and it seemed no matter how long I patted him and played with him, it was never enough," admits Ms. Newell.

So she decided to share Oscar's love and gentleness.

After reading an article about animal programs in institutional settings, Ms. Newell got the idea that Oscar's love of humans could be used to give some joy to people who really need it.

Soon after, she approached Kelly Herbert, the Bennett Centres' director of resident care who got caught up in Ms. Newell's enthusiasm.

"She's such a marvellous person. She understands how important pets are to people and wanted to share her pet," said Ms. Herbert.

Three- and-a-half years later, Ms. Herbert still has nothing but praise for Oscar and Ms. Newell.

"They're just wonderful. Adjectives can't describe the warmth of feeling and presence they bring here.

"We're always extending our thanks to Ms. Newell because she has given so much," she said.

But Ms. Newell doesn't want thanks.

"I don't do this as some sort of volunteer charity. I look forward to coming here," she honestly revealed. "These people are my friends. I feel so attached to them, we talk as if we're family."

It may be a strange family: a dog, a young woman and over 20 long-term care residents, but it's a loving and caring family. The best kind.



Oscar, a Golden-Retriever cross and his owner, Deborah Newell (centre) of Georgetown have become fast friends with Vern Wheeler (left) and Bill Gibbs (right) and many other residents at the Bennett Health Care Centre located in Georgetown.

Oscar and Deborah have been visiting residents weekly for almost four years and Deborah says she and Oscar get as much from the visits as the residents do. (Herald Photo by Lisa Boonstoppel-Pot)

School bus no-show raises mother's ire

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT
The Herald

A Georgetown mother said her child's school bus has gone from "being late to dangerous" and she wants something done.

Kelly Pringle, of Normandy Boulevard in Georgetown, said the bus that takes her child and others in the area to Harrison Public School is "usually late" and one day didn't show up at all.

"I'm scared something will happen to the children who wait there for the bus to come," she said. "I

know I sound paranoid but in this day and age, parents can't afford not to be paranoid."

Her concerns came to a head last Wednesday when the bus didn't show up at all.

"All the kids who wait at that bus stop are in Grade 2 or younger and most parents don't wait for the bus to show up, they just leave their kids there," she said. "When the bus didn't show up, I took my son and two other children, whom I didn't know, to school. I couldn't

just leave them there. But what would have happened if I'd been in an accident with those kids!" she wondered.

Ms. Pringle said she's called Harrison Public School to complain about the service but wanted to call the Herald to make sure the issue goes public.

Max Jackson, principal of Harrison Public School admits there was a problem with the bus route, but said he's confident "it's being looked after."

"I contacted the Halton Board of

Education's Transportation Department and they track down the reason for the lateness," he said.

Reg Witoszkin is the Transportation Officer for the Board and he said "we're working now to make sure the problem is being rectified."

Though he hasn't received any calls from parents, he knows the particular bus route (Route 312) has been experiencing problems and said there are a number of reasons for the delays.

One of the reasons is that the bus drivers on Route 312 have to first complete a bus route for Georgetown District High School which begins at 7:50 a.m. The bus drivers then start the Harrison School bus route at 8:20 a.m. Some of the lateness is due to the double route.

Another reason the bus was often late was that one of the two bus drivers assigned to the route "had difficulties keeping on schedule," said Mr. Witoszkin. "To rectify the problem, we're starting both routes five minutes sooner and keeping an eye on that route to make sure it's working."

As for the day the bus never showed up, that was because the bus, owned by the private company Halton School Transit, broke down

and was unable to communicate to its base, he said.

"Because the bus driver couldn't reach the main office, the company wasn't aware of the problem until they got a call from Harrison Public School," said Mr. Witoszkin. "As soon as they (the bus company) were notified, they sent another bus down the route to pick up any kids that were still waiting."

Now that the situation has been investigated, Mr. Witoszkin said he longer sees the situation as a "continual problem."

But Ms. Pringle wonders if they're having so many problems getting kids to school on time, why doesn't the transportation department put another bus on the route."

Mr. Witoszkin said it just comes down to cost.

"We save a lot of money if we can hire one bus to do two routes instead of hiring two buses," he said.

He also dismisses Ms. Pringle's concerns that bus lateness could contribute to child abductions.

"The parents are responsible for their children until they get on the bus," he stated. "Due to unforeseen mechanical problems and weather conditions, we can't guarantee the buses will be on schedule and it's up to the parents to look after their kids before the bus picks them up."



Cheque presentation

The Georgetown and Acton Senior Associations each have \$14,000 more to use in their attempt to establish senior centres in their respective communities. The money was raised through a charity golf tournament organized by Halton Region Chairman Peter Pomeroy this past summer at Blue Springs Golf Club in Acton. Chairman

Pomeroy presented the cheques during Monday's town council meeting to Georgetown seniors Association representative Les Mellish and Acton seniors Association representative Gerald Rennie. Pictured above left to right are town Mayor Russ Miller, Mr. Rennie, Mr. Mellish and Chairman Pomeroy. (Herald Photo).

Unacceptable increase

Georgetown Halton Board of Education trustee, Dick Howitt, said a forecast of the board's expenditures which reveals a possible 7.8 percent cost increase is "unacceptable."

The preliminary expenditure forecast amounts to \$296 million, an increase of 7.87 per cent over the 1991 budget.

Superintendent of Business Services for the Board, Jerry Jenkins,

stated in his report that in order to prepare a preliminary forecast, the following assumptions were made: inflation staying at five per cent for supplies, services and books; no change in enrollment for 1992; and that salaries be adjusted for economic increases.

He also states the forecast doesn't include costs of multi-year programs or any new requests for 1992.