

Press Release

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WRWA VOLUNTEERS WAG THEIR TAILS FOR AIRPORT VISITORS **Pet Therapy Teams to Provide Comfort for Stressed Travelers**

OKLAHOMA CITY, Friday, April, 2014 – Feeling a bit frazzled from the demands of air travel? A little pet therapy might help. Beginning today, 12 starter teams will begin working at the airport providing comfort and stress relief to travelers and visitors. These teams are volunteers with Human Animal Link of Oklahoma, or H.A.L.O., a nonprofit foundation dedicated to the use of qualified pets as a resource to promote health and wellness. The two-member dog and owner teams will work in all areas of the airport terminal.

“Pets offer us moments of joy and peace,” says H.A.L.O. Executive Director, Terri Smith. “The experience of quality interaction with a non-judgmental team can be of benefit to the many visitors at Will Rogers. People in the airport setting may be stressed from traveling; others may be experiencing anxiety for totally different reasons. Either way, our teams provide an opportunity to brighten spirits for those of all ages.”

H.A.L.O.’s operating philosophy is based on the knowledge that pets have the ability to deliver therapeutic care to those experiencing times of transition, trauma, or stress. H.A.L.O. teams provide animal assisted therapy and activities in numerous settings including hospitals, elder and hospice care, youth and family services, educational programs in our schools, and now airports.

“H.A.L.O. pet teams are a very exciting and therapeutic addition to the airport,” says Mark Kranenburg, Airports Director. “There is a lot of stress involved in air travel, even when everything goes smoothly. I know H.A.L.O. teams will be very popular here at Will Rogers, not just among travelers, but visitors and airport employees as well.”

Before owner and pet qualify as a therapy team, both undergo rigorous training. All pets must demonstrate excellence in temperament, disposition, and obedience. Yearly health screening exams are required. Handlers must be personable, articulate, and respectful of the needs of others. Constant assessment of different settings and situations is essential to the success of the team.

H.A.L.O. dogs are easily identifiable in yellow vests with patches stating, “Ask to Pet Me; I’m Friendly!” H.A.L.O. teams do not approach people without invitation, but allow those interested to come to them.

“Our teams are trained to be aware of their surroundings including people and objects in the environment,” says Smith. “Not all individuals are comfortable around animals, and we are sensitive to that feeling. Those who desire interacting with a personable dog are welcome to seek a visit.”

Travelers and visitors should be mindful that not all dogs in the terminal are available for petting. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has several canine teams whose mission is to detect explosives. Persons with disabilities have service animals that assist them with daily activities. These dogs are trained for specific duties and should not be petted without express permission from the owner or handler.

But H.A.L.O. dogs are just waiting to be noticed and petted.

“Our dogs love to be engaged,” says Smith. “They effortlessly reach into the mind and heart of each visitor. It’s amazing to see this type of interaction which allows a visible reduction in stress.”

More information about H.A.L.O. can be found at yourhalofoundation.org.

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Will Rogers World Airport is Oklahoma City’s commercial airport and accommodates over three and a half million travelers each year. The airport services 21 nonstop airports with an average of 75 daily departures. Will Rogers World Airport is owned by the City of Oklahoma City and leased to the Oklahoma City Airport Trust. The Trust oversees the management and operation of the airport.