

Benefit helps seniors, pets

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By PAUL LaPANN (plapann@newsandsentinel.com) Parkersburg News and Sentinel

Some Wood County senior citizens now won't have to worry about feeding their pets.

Thanks to a recent benefit at J.P. Henry's restaurant, homebound seniors will receive donated food for their dogs and cats.

Home Helpers of Parkersburg worked with the Wood County Senior Citizens Association to collect dog and cat food, cat litter, treats, food bowls, collars and other supplies, which are being delivered to senior citizens for their pets.

Some of the items were brought to J.P. Henry's on April 14 - where there was food, a band, prizes and 50/50 drawing - while other pet supplies were collected at nursing homes and businesses.

A portion of the \$1,200 donated will be given to the senior citizens association's Meals on Wheels program. Meals on Wheels created WALOP, or We All Love Our Pets, as a way to deliver pet food to seniors.

"We did amazingly well," said Home Helpers manager Kathy Robinson. "So many people donated to the cause."

The specific food and special needs of 35 dogs and 28 cats belonging to senior citizens were met, said Stephanie Deem, Home Helpers marketing director, who coordinated the collection drive. She spent time sorting the supplies, which filled her garage and greenhouse, for delivery to seniors.

By visiting the homes of senior citizens through Home Helpers, Robinson said she realizes how important pets are as companions to elderly folks.

Some seniors have a difficult time finding enough money to feed themselves - let alone their pets, Robinson said. And pets may be the only companions the elderly have, she added.

Mike Dennis, executive director of the Wood County Senior Citizens Association on Market Street, said many of the seniors visiting the center for meals and activities talk about their pets. They may live alone and feel isolated, so pets fill a void in their lives, he said.

The senior citizens association has seen an increase in Meals on Wheels participation, with about 125 meals delivered five days a week in Wood County. Another 75 meals are served daily at senior centers in Parkersburg, Williamstown and Vienna, Dennis said.

This month's event was so successful that Deem anticipates it becoming an annual project and possibly an ongoing outreach in the community.