

## MEET VOLUNTEERS ELLEN & STEVE LUCKMAN

# A PETS ON WHEELS LOVE STORY

When Steve and Ellen Luckman met 32 years ago as Pets on Wheels volunteers, who would have guessed it would lead to marriage and three decades of therapy pet service? They became acquainted during visits with their friendly felines to residents at Levindale Geriatric Home. Steve says, "From the start, we had a lot in common. We both were cat people, and we both believed in giving back." Ellen agrees. "Cats and volunteer work brought us together. When we found out we worked just a subway stop or two from each other, we decided to get together for lunch." From there the relationship blossomed. A year and a half later, they wed.

Today the Luckmans are still cat people, and they're still active members of Pets on Wheels. During their time together, they've shared volunteer assignments with a host of therapy cats. In the early years, they made therapy pet visits with Brother, Otis, Willy, Baby, Binky, Lucky, Tucky, Sheba, and Izzy. Today, they partner with Tinky, Sterling, and Luna. How do they determine if a cat might make a good therapy pet? Steve says, "All of the ones we've enrolled in Pets on Wheels have been capable of behaving calmly and liked getting out to see the world. During visits they enjoy giving comfort and respond to the praise and pets they receive."

Asked to recall a favorite volunteer moment, Ellen laughs and says, "One of our earlier pet partners — Tucky — got to know her visiting routine so well that she would go from room-to-room to cuddle up with her regular residents. Everyone enjoyed watching when she left her next-to-last room, because she would dash all the way down the hall on her own to her last resident so she could jump up onto her bed and snuggle next to her."

After volunteering at Levindale, the Luckmans shared their cats with patients in the physical and psychological rehabilitation units at Sinai Hospital. For a decade or more, they've both made therapy pet visits to residents in Arden Court's Pikesville Alzheimer's Unit. Steve and Tinky also spend an hour or so each week with residents at Futurecare. He says, "We've learned that every person, no matter how physically or mentally challenged, can appreciate interactions with animal and human visitors if you allow them to experience the visit in their own way."

The Luckmans have seen many changes during their three decades with Pets on Wheels. Ellen notes, "When we first joined, it only had a few dozen members, and they were mainly in the Baltimore area." Today the not-for-profit has members throughout much of Maryland, and its volunteer therapy pet teams reach more than 175,000 people at nearly 400 facilities a year.

Ellen and Steve's years of success show that cats can be excellent therapy team partners. How has their pet therapy work rubbed off on their relationship? Steve says "Cats are very good at giving people someone to listen to or be with. Sometimes it's important to just be there That's something we try to remember outside of Pets on Wheels."

