

Therapy dog eases students' stress in regional district

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

ERMA — Few dogs go to school with the exception of television's Lassie, which followed her owner Timmy to the schoolyard. In the real world, a dog at school turns out to be an ice-breaker and a stress breaker.

Hours before Christmas vacation started for Lower Cape May Regional High School students Dec. 23, health and physical education teacher Karen Wadding was walking her dog Molly, a 14-month old black Labrador-Boxer mix, from classroom to classroom to the delight of many students.

According to Director of Curriculum and Instruction Joe Castellucci, Wadding suggested bringing in a therapy dog as the school approached the first administration of new state testing as a stress breaker for students.

The school district piloted a program last year to bring in therapy dogs at high-stress times for students, during state testing, prior to holidays and crisis times.

"I am happy to report that the evidence gathered thus far has been overwhelmingly positive," Castellucci said.

While one may suppose the approach of 10 days off from school during the holiday season would be a joyous occa-



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Lower Cape May Regional High School AP history students Josh Hedu, Desiree Tolchin and Cassidy Fletcher meet Molly during her pre-holiday visit to the school district. Health and physical education teacher Karen Wadding brings the dog to school during stressful times to help the students relax.

some students dread the prospect due to an unhappy life at home. Molly was scheduled to visit the school the day before winter break as a stress breaker, he said.

"For a lot of kids, this is not a good time and not everyone's thrilled school won't be in session" Wadding said.

She said not everyone has a great Christmas dinner waiting for them and a load of presents under the tree. For students whose parents are separated or going through a divorce, or if alcoholism or addiction is present in the home, Wadding said those students would rather be in school than on holiday break.

"Their friends are here, there's a support group here," she said. "You give them 10 days off, it's like the bottom is falling out."

School nurse Bonnie Walker said for a student having a crisis moment, perhaps crying in the nurse's or guidance office, a therapy dog can change their focus from their problem and bring a nurturing moment.

Wadding is no stranger to therapy dogs. She owns Maddie and Riley, two 10-year-old dogs who visit patients at Cape Regional Medical Center. Castellucci encouraged her to bring a dog to school each day during end-of-the-year exams, she said.

"It really worked out well," Wadding said.

When Molly comes to school, she splits her day between the high school and Richard M. Teitelman Middle School.

Molly was born deaf and her leash identifies her as such to students. She has learned sign language for activities such as sitting, eating a cookie and coming to her owner. Molly finished a basic obedience class and a "canine good citizen class" prior to taking a therapy dog test, Wadding said.

"They're looking for how a dog would relate to friendly strangers and somebody with an uneven gait," she said. "They have to be able to tolerate all parts of their body being

touched, especially the pads of their feet."

Wadding said nothing bothers Molly such as being petted as she walks down a crowded hallway while classes are changing.

"You guys are allowed up here to pet her, she's a therapy dog, she likes people," Wadding said as she entered Sandra Eakin's AP history class.

She advised students to sit on the floor with the dog. As the students petted Molly, she almost fell asleep. Wadding said when she approaches special education classes with the dog,

the students stop what they're doing and crowd around her.

Molly also visits hospital patients. Wadding said some patients cry when meeting Molly because they miss their dog.

Wadding said a special education student who attends school with a one-on-one aide had displayed no interaction with the teacher or classmates, but after playing with Molly, the student put her head on her teacher's shoulder and began talking about her dogs.

Molly will return to the school when classes resume Jan. 4.

Real estate rebounding

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slightly up.

In November, the median sales price for a single-family home in Atlantic County was \$191,500, down from \$200,000 in November 2014, with an average of 123 days on the market until sale. For townhomes/condos, the median sales price was \$109,000, down from \$112,000 in November 2014, and the average number of days on the market was 133, up from 112 the year prior.

For adult community properties, the median home sale price was \$139,450 in November, down from \$162,000 in November 2014, and the average days on the market until sale was 129, up from 112.

In 2015, there were also more single-family homes and adult community properties listed for sale.

There were 5,708 single family homes for sale, up from 5,310 in November 2014, and 315 adult community properties, up from 305 in 2014.

Townhomes and condos were in shorter supply in the county. Through November, there were 1,912 townhomes/condos listed for sale, down from 2,009 year to date in November 2014.

"We had a good, strong spring and we had an early spring so that helped us," Wescoat said. "There was a flurry of activity in early spring and it carried through to the summer."

The island communities' markets are healthy though not as much as they used to be, according to Wescoat.

The mainland's markets are flat to declining, she said.

The average price of a home sold in November in Atlantic County was highest in Longport, where the average price was \$1.67 million.

Other island communities' average prices were also high comparatively.

For Margate, the average price of a home sold in November was \$945,229, and in Ventnor, the average was \$437,200.

The lowest prices of homes sold in Atlantic County in November were in Pleasantville and Egg Harbor City, for \$64,430 and \$76,375, respectively.

In Atlantic City, the average price was \$84,400.

"It's a great time for investors. It's a great time for people who are just buying into the market. There's a lot of opportunities for a first time buyer or people trying to buy up," Wescoat said. "There's also opportunities for people who are investors that buy a fixer upper and then they rehab it and flip it. That's helping our economy and our market."

"If we get through these short and foreclosures, we'll find ourselves with a better, more stable number," Wescoat said.

According to RealtyTrac, in November, one in every 306 housing units in Atlantic County was in some stage of foreclosure.

The municipalities with the highest foreclosure rates were mainland communities, including Port Republic (one in every 130), Milmay, (one in every 160), Estell Manor (one in every 178), Pleasantville (one in every 182), and Mays Landing (one in every 195).

Though foreclosure rates were high, they appeared to be stabilizing in the county.

According to RealtyTrac, the number of properties that received a foreclosure filing in the county in November was 16 percent lower than October. It was 6 percent lower in November than it was at the same time in 2014.

Atlantic County home sales for October were up 550 percent over the previous month, but down 52 percent compared with the same time in 2014.

"Unemployment is still a huge issue here for people," Wescoat said. "You have to have something for the demographic to support themselves and if there's not jobs how do you support yourself? What we're finding is there is going to be an influx of people coming from the west to purchase in Atlantic County where they're finding a better deal rather than Marlton, rather than Cherry Hill."

Brighter signs in Cape May County

Cape May County's real estate market seemed brighter in 2015 than neighboring Atlantic County's market, although some mainland communities also struggled with high foreclosure rates.

According to RealtyTrac, in November, one in every 799 housing units in Cape May County was in some stage of foreclosure.

The top five municipalities with the highest foreclosure rates in the county included Rio Grande (one in every 236), Villas (one in every 325), Cape May Court House (one in every 421), Woodbine (one in every 425), and Wildwood (one in every 673).

As with Atlantic County, RealtyTrac data suggested foreclosure rates were falling.

The number of properties in Cape May County that received a foreclosure filing in November was 12 percent lower than the previous month and 12 percent lower than the same time in 2014.

Home sales were up 1025 percent in October from September, but down 88 percent from the same time in 2014.

The median sales price of a non-distressed home was \$413,000, and the median sales price of a foreclosure home was \$163,635.

According to New Jersey Realtors, closed sales of single-family homes were up 19.5 percent through November 2014 to November 2015, from 1,335 to 1,595.

The average days on the market until sale decreased slightly, from 129 to 139 from November 2014 to November 2015, although the median sales price decreased slightly, from \$320,000 in November 2014 to \$310,000 in November.

For townhomes/condos, the closed sales increased 16.2 percent, from 1,322 year to date in November 2014 to 1,536 this November.

The days on the market for townhomes/condos also decreased, from 143 in November 2014 to 135 in November, year to date.

The median sales price was relatively stable year to date. The November median sales price was \$409,900, and in November 2014, it was \$410,500.

TIDES : December 2015-January 2016				
Date	High		Low	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
30	11:11	11:53	4:48	5:34
31	11:56		5:38	6:19
1	12:48	12:48	6:34	7:10
2	1:41	1:42	7:32	7:57
3	2:36	2:39	8:31	8:45
4	3:29	3:35	9:29	9:33
5	4:18	4:29	10:22	10:18
6	5:05	5:18	11:11	11:03

MOON PHASES
Last Quarter, Jan. 2 • New Moon, Jan. 10

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