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Willow's work ensures children are not alone

BY JEFFREY HAGE
MONTICELLO TIMES



Puppy kisses, love and tail wags are changing the way some Monticello Middle School students are making it through their Wednesdays.

Amy Walz, owner of an organization called "You're Not Alone," is bring a 2-year-old Golden Retriever named Willow to the school for about two hours each Wednesday to offer respite to students who might need a break from the pressures of the day.

"Our children are in great need of a listening ear when it comes to mental health/wellness," Walz said.

Willow not only provides that listening ear, but a warm, furry friend who is a calming influence to many students.

Similar to a hall pass, students can obtain a Puppy Pass in order to join a 15-minute group session with

Willow during their lunch breaks.

Large groups often have as many as 15-20 students, says Monticello Middle School media specialist Kari Green. Small group sessions consist of about five students. The sessions are held in the school's library.

"I love the idea that kids can come to the library and see Willow," said Green, who coordinates the sessions with Amy Walz and Willow.

The two provide social and emotional support, as well as other resources a child might need, Green said.

On Wednesday, Feb. 9, Willow in the library at about 11:15 anxiously waiting to meet with her first group of students.

In exchange for a dog treat (or two), Willow would perform some tricks, and give a few hand shakes.

Two students were allowed to pet Willow at a time, an

Willow / See page 14

Off to State



Photo by Paul Krumrei / For the Monticello Times

The Big Lake gymnastics team has advanced to the Minnesota State Gymnastics Meet after being crowned the Section 7A champs for the third consecutive year on Saturday, Feb. 12. Four girls advanced to the individual meet, as well. The state gymnastics meet is Friday, Feb. 18 and Saturday, Feb. 19 at the Roy Wilkins Auditorium in St. Paul. See the Monticello Times coverage in Sports.

City's old, new DMV buildings fill vacancies

BY JEFFREY HAGE
MONTICELLO TIMES

A building vacated by Monticello's department of motor vehicles and a building housing the new DMV offices are getting new tenants.

The Monticello City Council on Monday, Feb. 14 approved a recommendation to lease the former DMV building to Preferred Title.

The council also approved a lease agreement with the Monticello Chamber of Commerce and Industry which will result in the Chamber moving from its longtime headquarters at 205 Pine St. to the Prairie Center Building, which in December, 2021 became the home of the new DMV operations.

The City has purchased Preferred Title's current home at 113 W. Broadway St. for the Block 52 development where a 5-story multi-use development is

Buildings / See page 3

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THIS WEEK IN SPORTS

Magic girls win

Dakota Parker broke the Monticello High School varsity diving record in swimming competition.



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Newstand Price: \$1.50





Photo by Jeffrey Hage / Monticello Times

Harlee Kolles pets Willow as Amy Walz looks on.



Photo by Jeffrey Hage / Monticello Times

Willow uses her nose to check out Navaeh Lynas during a Wednesday, Feb. 9 session with Willow and Amy Walz at Monticello Middle School.

Willow: Golden retriever is an angel from above who has found a special role in comforting children

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act that resulted in Willow acting like a carpet.

“She loves to lie like a rug,” Walz said of the dog, who has among her favorite things eating cheese and chewing on bones.

Walz, who struggled with her own mental health and wellness, says four years of therapy was the best gift she ever gave herself.

Willow is one of the best gifts she has received from outside of her family.

“Now she’s my therapy,”

Walz told the students.

Walz received Willow two years ago from an organization called Canines for Caring.

Willow was part of a litter born to a breeder, but was not spoken for.

At the same time, Walz was looking for a dog she could train to be a therapy dog. However, such a dog came with an exorbitant cost.

The breeder worked with the organization to find a home where an

owner would do good with Willow. They found Amy Walz.

Walz had an agreement with a large hospital organization to begin the process of introducing people Willow to people who were in need of some special love.

But COVID-19 hit, and Willow’s visits to hospital never materialized.

It was a blessing in disguise, Walz says.

“You’re Not Alone was able to establish a new

mission- bringing the love of a pup to all schools in Minnesota by having therapy dogs available in each district.

“God has given us amazing animals, but I don’t believe we are utilizing them for all they can do for us,” Walz said.

The love of a dog such as Willow can make a child’s day brighter and bring a sense of relief from any anxiety and depression they are living with, Walz said.

That’s the “unconditional love” Walz talks to children about in each session with Willow.

Walz’ second goal with You’re Not Alone is to create a network of crisis workers who work with dogs such as Willow who can be beside families at their worst moments.

Walz says Willow might have an even bigger purpose in her life someday.

Because Willow suffers from Dysplasia, it is be-

lieved that she will someday have to move through the use of a wagon.

When that day comes, Willow could find herself working with residents of a Veterans Administration hospital who are confined to wheelchairs or maybe working with children with disabilities at the Minneapolis Shriners’ Hospital.

“I think Willow will have a bigger role than maybe we thought she would,” Walz said.

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