

SOUTHAMPTON, HOLLAND,
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Inside Bucks County...

With a few ceremonial shovelfuls of dirt, the Bridge Street Foundation kicked off the final phase of a project it started nearly six years ago.

Last Wednesday was the groundbreaking ceremony for the rear lobby of the Bucks County Playhouse. Slated to be completed for the 2017 season, the fully enclosed structure will seat around 150 people and feature a full bar and kitchen.

For the story, turn to page 12.



Coming soon...

The *Midweek Wire* debuts its new name and design next week. Turn to page 5 for the details.

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Melissa Yerkov
Wire Photo

Panda was rescued by Eli and Gladys Blank, who receive pet food donations from Sam's Hope. The Newtown-based organization was founded in February 2013 and has since helped more than 6,000 families keep their pets.



At your service

Sam's Hope provides veterinary grants for animals in need and also helps elderly owners care for their pets.

By: Melissa Yerkov, The Wire

Sam's Hope understands the power of pets.

The Newtown-based nonprofit organization was founded in February 2013 and has since helped more than 6,000 families keep their pets healthy

and where they belong — home.

Their mission is simple: "Keep Pets and Their People Together." The organization accomplishes this through pet food donations, delivery services and grants to help pay veterinary

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Sam's Hope

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bills. Since its inception, Sam's Hope has awarded 145 veterinary care grants to those in need. The grants aid low-income pet owners who cannot afford the cost of medical care for their pets.

"We're keeping animals in their homes. There is not a lot of funding out there for that," explained Sam's Hope founder and Newtown resident Marianne Iaquinto. "I think it's relatively a new idea. Instead of sheltering these animals and hoping for the best, it's a way of keeping them in their homes."

Sam's Hope has many community outreach programs including collecting food donations for pets in need and delivering food and supplies to homebound elderly pet owners. The organization distributes approximately 4,000 pounds of food throughout the area each month. Most of that feeds cats and dogs, but can also include food for birds, hamsters and gerbils.

Eli and Gladys Blank receive food donations from Sam's Hope bimonthly. They found Panda, a tuxedo cat, aban-

doned outside with no food or water. He had been declawed, which led his new owners to believe he was once domesticated, but someone left him behind.

"When you get old, you don't think that you're going to get another pet," said Gladys. "But when you see him outside with no claws to defend himself, how can you not help him?"

"Besides, a house is not a home with-

"Animals are good for people. If people had misfortune in their life and need help, it keeps that animal there, which is important and healthy. The elderly and homebound don't get out much. Their pets are all they see sometimes."

out an animal," she added.

The services offered by Sam's Hope are not just beneficial to animals, but people as well. According to the SPCA, pet owners are less likely to suffer from depression. They have lower blood pressure and less anxiety. Having a pet can also increase exercise, socialization and provide companionship.

"Animals are good for people. If people had misfortune in their life and

need help, it keeps that animal there, which is important and healthy," said Iaquinto. "The elderly and homebound don't get out much. Their pets are all they see sometimes."

The Homebound Elderly Program at Sam's Hope officially began in September 2014. Volunteers reached out to local business looking for donations and then organized food pantries and

dropoffs for those in need.

"Some of these people might have hit that rough spot and can't afford to feed or take their pet to vet and they end up having to surrender their animals," said Iaquinto. "That's a burden on the shelter system. Seven to eight million pets annually pass through shelters and only half of them make it out."

Since its inception, Sam's Hope has grown to distribute more than 150,000

pounds of pet food throughout Philadelphia, Bucks and Montgomery counties. Its biggest challenge is the need for more volunteers. As the nonprofit expands to help more pets and owners in need, its resources have become much more strained. Also, the organization is unable to afford an office space, so currently, volunteers work out of a storage unit in Bucks County.

"It would be so much easier for volunteers, but we do not have an office space. We just don't have the funds," she said. "The challenge is always going to be the volunteers, money. That's with every organization."

She hopes to expand Sam's Hope citywide and also partner with an online retailer that can help deliver food and supplies to clients more often.

"I would love to grow the Homebound Elderly Program. The elderly with their pets — they have an amazing bond. You have to be there to see it," said Iaquinto. "It's about the bond. They're part of your family. It's about keeping that together. We made a lot of life-or-death differences for these animals. Being able to save them, it's a beautiful thing." ♦

For information, visit samshope.org.