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Our Founder — Eileen Curry

Supplied by Vicky Graham, President



Eileen passed away peacefully on 25 April, 10 days after her 96th birthday. She resided at Aroha Rest Home in Lower Hutt and sadly, due to COVID-19, was unable to celebrate her birthday with family and friends. In true fashion she didn't complain and looked forward to seeing them once Aroha was out of lockdown. This wasn't meant to be.

Eileen established Canine Friends Pet Therapy with a group of like-minded friends in 1990. She was working with the SPCA when she witnessed a distressing incident that was the catalyst for Canine Friends. An elderly woman was going into care and could not take her beloved dog with her, nor had any family to take her dog. Eileen was very moved at witnessing the owner's despair at parting with her dog that she offered to visit this woman with one of her own Golden Retrievers. She quickly realised this could be a service that would bring comfort to many people... especially the elderly and those who feel isolated, stressed and afraid.

Several years later Eileen was awarded a Hutt City Council Civic Award for her service to the community.

In a booklet titled *Canine Friends Pet Therapy – The First Ten Years... or so*, produced by two of Eileen's grandchildren, a paragraph reads:

"Watching Eileen work the room of a local retirement home with her dog Flare, it is difficult to imagine she is at least as old as many of the people she is visiting."

Eileen's reply was "Mentally I don't feel that old. I look at them and I see that they are elderly, but I don't see it in myself."

Not allowing age to be a barrier, she continued to visit into her 80s.

As we all know, Canine Friends is now a nationwide and respected charity with 664 members who are informed, caring dog owners, visiting 457 facilities. We invest in animal welfare issues and Canine Friends' principle goal of sharing our well behaved, cherished pets with those who are unable to have a dog of their own. We understand the value of pet therapy and enjoy seeing the benefits to those we visit in rest homes, hospitals, hospices, correction centres, colleges and universities.

Eileen was extremely proud of Canine Friends and has left a wonderful legacy, one which we will honour.

Finally, two of many tributes I received following Eileen's death:

"When I leave this world I hope to leave it better than I found it, leave a rainbow of lasting memories, have helped at least one person's life, well done Eileen, you achieved it all!"

And "She must have been an institution on her own starting this initiative at the age of 64". 🐾

Vicky Graham
President



Top: Eileen at the Canine Friends Liaison Officer's Day, 2018.

Bottom: Eileen with Kerrie, her last Golden Retriever which appears on the cover of the Canine Friends anniversary book.

If you and your dog would like to join us, please visit: www.caninefriends.org.nz