St. Louis Children's Hospital Patients Reunite With Their Pets at New Purina Family Pet Center

Center is Only Fourth in the World at a Pediatric Hospital

ST. LOUIS, May 19, 2016 /PRNewswire/ -- Madison Taliaferro spent weeks in the hospital in 2012. After a decade of suffering from cystic fibrosis, she underwent a double lung transplant. She powered through the difficult surgery and the recovery that followed –long days of physical therapy and rehabilitation. Her parents were there. Her best friend visited from Kansas. Grandparents rotated shifts so she was never alone. But one request still lingered.

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"I just wanted to see my dogs," she remembers.

Having suffered from the effects of chronic illness for the decade prior,Madison was no stranger to long days at home, isolated from the school germs that could turn her illness into a critical condition with a single sneeze. When her friends couldn't visit, her dogs were there. But at the hospital, they weren't.

"Our doctors see every day the importance of medicine and world class technology," saysJill Malan, manager of Child Life Services at St. Louis Children's Hospital. "We see every day the impact a child's emotional wellbeing has on their overall recovery."

With several examples to site, Malan proposed the idea of a room at the hospital which could facilitate visits between patients and their cats and dogs. Studies have shown that spending time with pets can reduce pain, anxiety, depression and fatigue in people with a wide range of health issues, and those staying in long-term care facilities.

"As soon as she suggested it, I knew we had to make it happen," saysLarry Vancil, director of facility services at Children's.

Vancil approached the St. Louis Children's Hospital Foundation; the Foundation contacted Purina, and Purina didn't hesitate. They enthusiastically agreed to support the construction and staffing of the center with a gift of $450,000. The Purina Family Pet Center at St. Louis Children's Hospital officially opened Wednesday with a ribbon tugging, led by a Golden Retriever-Labrador mix named "Happy Jack."

"At Purina we believe that pets and people are better together, and our friends at St. Louis Children's Hospital clearly share our belief," said Nina Leigh Krueger, Purina president. "Our goal for the Purina Family Pet Center is to bring joy and comfort to children and their families by helping them reunite with their pets during their stay."

The Purina Family Pet Center at St. Louis Children's Hospital gives patients the opportunity to see their pets without leaving the building, their doctors or the technology on which so many of them rely.

It is the first center of its kind in the region, and the fourth in the world.

The 300-square-foot room, adjacent to the hospital's second-floor entrance, features washable surfaces and windows to provide natural light. It can accommodate a child in a wheelchair or hospital bed, and provides a comfortable, private visiting space for the child, pet and family. It will also include toys for the pets and Purina treats the patients can feed their pets.

Purina has participated in the planning and design of the new pet-friendly center at St. Louis Children's Hospital. With expertise in animal behavior, the company shared information and provided advice to make the visit of the dogs and cats with their families as pleasant, safe and fun as possible. Purina behaviorists provided insights on the type of construction materials, access flow for the pets, furniture, paint colors and photos that will make the space warm and welcoming for the families and pets.

"We are so grateful to have received this gift," says Flip Becker, senior director with the St. Louis Children's Hospital Foundation. "I know what a difference this will make in the lives of our patients – a difference only made possible through the generous support of Purina."

Madison's mother, Desiree Taliaferro, echoes that sentiment. Though three years removed from transplant, her family still remembers those days and weeks clearly.

"It would have meant the world to Madison to see her dogs," Taliaferro says. "It will mean the world to the next family."

About St. Louis Children's Hospital
St. Louis Children's Hospital has provided specialized care for children for more than 130 years. US News & World Report ranks St. Louis Children's among the best pediatric hospitals in the nation. In 2015 the hospital received the Magnet re-designation from the American Nurses Credentialing Center, the nation's highest honor for nursing excellence. St. Louis Children's Hospital is affiliated with Washington University School of Medicine, one of the leading medical research, teaching and patient care institutions in the nation. The hospital is a member of BJC HealthCare. For more information, visit StLouisChildrens.org, or find us on Facebook and @STLChildrens on Twitter.

About Nestlé Purina PetCare
Nestlé Purina PetCare promotes responsible pet care, community involvement and the positive bond between people and their pets. A premier global manufacturer of pet products, Nestlé Purina PetCare is part of Swiss-based Nestlé S.A., a global leader in nutrition, health and wellness.

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