



## **aniMeals on Wheels Celebrates Successful First Year**

By Daphne Rozen, IM Volunteer

For many *Meals on Wheels for Greater Houston* recipients their pet is their constant companion and sometimes only friend. As a consequence of not being able to provide proper nutrition to themselves, many seniors also aren't able to properly care for their four-legged companion.

Too many seniors share their much needed delivered meal with their pet, usually the protein portion, in an effort to keep their pet for as many years as possible. To help address this issue, IM launched the **aniMeals on Wheels** program.

The program, which celebrates its first-year anniversary this month, proves that not only do people and pets go hand-in-hand, but they also make for a winning combination.

“This is a way to support seniors, as well as a way to support their pets and help them maintain their independence and keep the companionship of their pets,” said IM Volunteer Manager Tiffany Harris.

Currently, there are 169 **aniMeals** clients –all of whom also receive Meals on Wheels services, the only stipulation of the aniMeals program.

Every fourth Saturday of the month, IM staffers and volunteers gather to sort, repack, and deliver dog and cat food. While dry pet food is sorted into three-pound bags (one pound per animal), canned foods are delivered as is. Harris said, at the moment, the **aniMeals** program can accommodate up to four animals per household.

All of the pet food comes strictly from donations with the SPCA contributing approximately 70 percent; the remaining 30 percent comes from community donations.

**aniMeals on Wheels** also relies heavily on its volunteers. At the present, there are 35 volunteers who assist with the program on a regular basis. Many of them come from the SPCA, El Paso Energy, Girl Scouts, and various Houston-area schools. Volunteers can either repack food or use their own vehicles to make deliveries.

Brother and sister team, Brittany and Hunter Bollenbach, find that volunteering allows them to explore their passions while helping others.

“I like to work with animals and helping out,” said Brittany, an eighth-grader at Hamilton Middle School. Her brother agreed. “I like to work with animals,” said Hunter, a fifth-grader at Oak Forest Elementary. “I’m helping them (seniors) because they can’t afford to feed their pets.”

Long-time **aniMeals** volunteer, Barbara Baldaro, said she sees the difference a friendly visit can make in the lives of seniors and their pet companions.

“It’s important because these animals are sometimes the only companions these seniors have,” said Baldaro. “In that regard, the animals are treated well because they’re like their children.”

Senior Larry Montgomery is indebted to the **aniMeals** program as it allows him to better care for his 4-year-old Basset Bloodhound, Hogeey.

“It (the **aniMeals** program) means a lot to me,” Montgomery said. “It helps me take care of my dog. He’s what I have left of my family because my wife passed away three years ago.”

Montgomery especially enjoys the regular deliveries of pet food. Like most **aniMeals** clients with dogs, he receives both dry and canned food, which he makes into a mixture for Hogeey (who prefers canned dog food).

“I don’t buy canned food,” Montgomery added. “I live on social security and money is tight.”

In the future, Harris hopes the **aniMeals** program will expand to reach every pet-owning senior enrolled in Meals on Wheels and will expand to serve more types of pets, such as birds.

Those involved with **aniMeals** believe the future looks bright. “It’s a great program run by great people,” Baldaro said. “It’s a good, friendly atmosphere.”

Help support **aniMeals on Wheels!** Give a donation of pet food by simply dropping by Interfaith Ministries, at 3217 Montrose Boulevard, during business hours. For volunteer information, please call Tiffany Harris at 713-533-4922 or e-mail her at [tharris@imgh.org](mailto:tharris@imgh.org).