



Puppy Tails

MIALIE T. SZYMANSKI | CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

*As the moon goes to bed, the sun comes up
And here we meet a sleepy pup,
Who was walking through G-ville one bright sunny
day,
Then saw The Villager and decided to stay.*

The snow fluttered gently through the air as Doodle Dog followed his nose down the sidewalk and through town. He could smell not only the crisp breath of winter but also a burnt woody note from a neighbor's chimney smoke, the warmth of hot steam from homemade cocoa combined with cinnamon wafting from a nearby kitchen, and the even more pleasant whiff of chestnut cookies freshly baked at a shop in town, all hints of the season that mixed in as he breathed deeply and continued to patter along.

Evergreen trees of all varieties clustered together in the fields and meadows the floppy-eared puppy scampered past and the usually green grass had a light dusting of the fluttering snow like powdered sugar on the cookies Doodle Dog was sure he could smell. He followed the scent as it grew stronger, even though it was leading him away from the middle of town. Maybe it wasn't the bake shop that was sending out the wonderful scent!

Soon enough Doodle Dog followed his nose to one of his favorite places and slipped in the door just as two uniformed soldiers were coming out of the building with arms full of brightly-wrapped packages. Books on carts lined the foyer and the hallway leading into the main part of the library, but Doodle Dog went right on by them as he continued to follow where his nose led him. Ah, there it is! He KNEW he had smelled something yummy! Just past the big desk where books are adopted was a very long table stretching the length of the wall. All the bookshelves that usually stood straight and tall there had been stored away to make room for a special project. That explained all the extra carts standing guard in the hallway and greeting visitors with their beautiful books. And out of the way, in a little room off to the side behind the big desk, was a smaller table with trays of cookies of all kinds, some even covered in sugar like the powdery snow in the fields, and a large silver container with a little spout that poured out something warm and pepperminty. On the floor tucked under the table was an array of bowls filled with a colorful assortment of chewy treats and doggie biscuits. They smelled wonderful too!

But Doodle Dog did not go in the little room where the yummy smells were hiding. Now that he knew what had been making his nose twitch and his curiosity was satisfied for the moment, he could go about his errand, and what a very special errand it was! The floppy-eared puppy made his way past the doorway of the little room and continued on to the long table stretching the length of the wall of the main area. It was covered in rolls and rolls of brightly colored wrapping paper, spools of glittering ribbon and piles of dazzling stickers to add just a special spot of sparkle. Volunteers big and small were gathered around the table wrapping toys from a large box at one end of the row. At the other end of the counter was an even bigger box, festively wrapped in gleaming green paper with a big silver bow stuck to the side. It reminded Doodle Dog of the dewy evergreen trees in the meadow with a dusting of silvery snow on their branches. One by one the wrapped toys were gently tossed into the giant green box until it was so full the packages were balancing on the very edges. But before they could topple out, the smartly dressed soldiers would come and rescue the gifts and take another armful. Then out from the first box came a little doll in a clear plastic case and soon it was a wrapped secret in the giant box. And then in went another gift, this time a freshly-covered train set. There were even baskets of chewy toys and catnip mousies that needed to be wrapped for the furry friends in town. Everyone was working so hard they looked like what Doodle Dog thought Santa's Workshop must look like just before Christmas Eve.

The floppy-eared puppy decided to join in and lend a paw, and scooted over beside the littlest of the library "elves" — one of his favorite kind of humans. The little girl giggled as Doodle Dog gently nudged her with his nose and she put a wrapped package on the floor so he could reach. She looped one end of a beautiful blue ribbon up one side of the box and one end up the other and crossed the ends in the middle. Doodle Dog put his paw up on the box and held the ends in place while the little girl pulled them together and tied them into a big, floppy bow. Into the giant container went their gift, right on the tippy top of the mountain. With Doodle Dog's help, and the help of all the volunteer pets and their humans, the group made quick work of the box of toys for humans and toys for pets, and then it was time to enjoy the yummy-smelling treats and celebrate a job well-done. But as much as the floppy-eared puppy would certainly enjoy the doggie biscuit waiting for him in the bowl under the table, the real treat for him was having helped make Christmas a little more special for all of his friends in town.

Mind Health Matters

New Year's Eve on the Helpline: 2013 starts off with a safe place to talk in the darkest hours

AMIE CAJKA | COLUMNIST

Have your plans made for New Year's Eve? Where will you be when the ball drops at Times Square at midnight? There is one person who has plans to be at the other end of 330-678-4357 if someone calls with an emotional problem, serious or not so much.

That number connects you to Townhall II's Helpline which has been in continuous service, every day, 24 hours a day since 1970. The service is funded for Portage County residents by the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County because it is a lifeline to suicide prevention, crisis support, referral information and drug treatment for many. No small responsibility day in and day out for 42 years.

Why would you ever pick up the phone to call and talk to a stranger about your problems? The person on the other end of the phone couldn't possibly understand or care about you and what you are going through. Where could you find someone at 3 a.m. to help you find hope when you face your darkest hour?

I put those questions to Renee Romine, who was a Helpline paraprofessional crisis interventionist for 14 years at Townhall II. Renee works for Kent State University in training and development for KSU Human Resources Division.

"I wanted to assist people. I was the type of person that I could really be there for someone on the phone and help them move forward," Renee said. Renee did her job so well that the agency named its Volunteer of the Year Award after her.

As a young adult in the 90s, Renee was looking for a volunteer job that would make a difference. A colleague told her about Townhall II and the Helpline. Her personal belief is that we are all duty bound to give back to our communities. She's serious about it and now focuses her volunteer time on youth and raising a daughter, who already as a teen has the same commitment to community.

If you had been someone who called in on Renee's weekly shift, you found a person who was calm, soft spoken and kind but purposeful. Her purpose: to help you take that first step to solving the problem.

"I was able to help callers calm down. Sometimes all people want is to talk about what is troubling them. They want to be listened to," she explained.

Renee used all of the skills acquired through the agency's training program to give the caller a sense of safety, a kind of time out from the chaos in his or her mind that obstructed clear thinking. She uses these skills today in her work and volunteering.

"The hardest calls were the calls from people thinking about suicide. You have to remind yourself that this person is calling for help, find a place in your mind for the negativity and proceed to do what you are trained to do and help the individual focus on a safety plan."

If the call was going south fast and the caller threatened to hang up, Renee would ask him or her to put the phone down, take a moment and then get back on the phone and continue talking with her. More often than not it worked but each case was different.

Townhall II logged more than 20,000 last year, about one third are crisis related. The Renees, the paraprofessionals on the line, work with callers to find resources for counseling, detox, health care, food, shelter, whatever will get them through. The callers are all ages; most of their problems revolve around relationship issues. No calls are refused; they may even come from another county or state. Helpline specialists have the resources to direct callers to services near their homes.

"My goal with callers was to focus on their concern, establish a rapport and empower them to take ownership of the situation. When in a crisis situation, it's difficult for most to see that they have more control over the situation than they realize. Then we would talk about a plan. Can they do it on their own or do they need help? What kind of help? We talked about the services and how to contact them," she recounted.

At times, she would hear back from a caller. More often than not, the person originally talked with one of Renee's fellow volunteers but the gratitude in the

voice on the other end of the line meant just as much to Renee. "The staff always felt really appreciative to have that feedback. It is gratifying to know that the person is on the mend and using services and to know we had an impact."

The Helpline is an important part of the Mental Health & Recovery Board's crisis intervention services available to county residents. Residents support the services through small mental health and recovery levies. From her perspective, the investment in the 24-hour phone line is priceless.

"It's critical that the community has a service with this kind of effect. Portage County is blessed to have a place where people can talk confidently about whatever is troubling them," Renee added.

Sometimes things just fall into place. I wanted to write about the Helpline volunteer specialists and their commitment to helping anyone who calls in. How great would it be if Townhall II had a Helpline training scheduled in case anyone was interested in becoming a volunteer like Renee?

It just so happens that the next training starts Monday, Feb. 11, 2013. The deadline to apply is Jan. 31. It's a very comprehensive course that is rolled out over a three-month period. Training takes place at Townhall II, 155 N. Water St., Kent. Call Paul, who manages the Helpline and the agency's emergency services, at 330-678-3006 with your questions.

You can find out more about Townhall II at the agency website, www.townhall2.com. You can also like Townhall II on Facebook and follow the agency on Twitter @TH2_kent.

The 24 numbers to reach someone like Renee whose DNA is wired to "be there" for you are:

- 330-678-4357
- 1-866-449-8518

The Mental Health & Recovery Board is a county agency that fund, plans and monitors public mental health and substance abuse treatment services for Portage County residents. Last year, the board invested in services that helped more than 7,000 children, teens and adults. The board also funds the 24-hour crisis intervention services which handle more than 39,000 contacts each year. The agency is primarily funded by local levies. To contact the board, call 330-673-1756.

Amie Cajka is the Director of Community Relations for the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County.


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1. WHERE THE JOBS ARE - Of the top 7 occupations expected to create the greatest number of new jobs through the year 2018, none require a 4-year college degree. The top 2 jobs on the list are registered nurses and home health aides (source: Department of Labor). 1/23/12 BTN issue
2. HELP - The number of Americans receiving food stamps increased +59% between fiscal year 2008 and 2011, rising from 28.2 million to 44.7 million (source: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). 2/06/12 BTN issue
3. BORROWING MAXIMUM - The USA's debt ceiling is currently \$16.4 trillion. This self-imposed limit on our country's ability to borrow funds has been increased by Congress 82 times since 1940, most recently in January 2012 (source: Congress). 2/27/12 BTN issue
4. TOO MANY HOMES - At the end of 1989, there were 60 million families that owned a home and 34 million families that rented a home or an apartment. At the end of 2011 (i.e., 22 years

All Remaining 2012 Exmark & Ferris
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Mowers on Clearance through
December 31, 2012.
Large Selection at Significant Savings.
Need to make room for 2013 models. 0%
Financing Available.



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