

West Chester

L I F E S T Y L E ™



Therapy Dog Symposium

UNIQUE, HYBRID CONFERENCE WILL BE ON-SITE AT ROWAN UNIVERSITY AND ONLINE WORLDWIDE

Article by Julie Brown Patton

Photography by Simon Bruty

Originally published in [West Chester Lifestyle](#)

More than 50,000 therapy dogs exist in America, according to *National Geographic* sources, and at least 60% of U.S. colleges have pet therapy programs. Therapy dogs are fondly nicknamed “comfort dogs.” No doubt, dogs are more than people's best friends.

To celebrate that special bond, the third National Dog Show Therapy Dog Symposium for therapy dog communities will be held Nov. 30 at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey, home of The Shreiber Family Pet Therapy Program at the University’s Wellness Center.

Animal therapy incorporates animals as a way to help people cope with, and recover from, physical and mental health conditions. Depending on the function of the therapy, people may choose dogs, horses or birds. Such animals provide comfort, alert about dangers, or perform direct actions to help a person’s condition when they are in need.

This year's all-day therapy symposium is open to the public, both on-site and online. Pre-registration, at a cost of \$20 for the livestream and \$50 for in-person attendance, includes lunch and a post-conference reception. A livestream link will be sent to online registrants a day before the event. Virtual attendees will be emailed PDFs.

Organizers indicate this unique forum is designed for dog handlers, therapy advocates, veterinary practitioners and aspirants to share information and develop best practices.

The conference launched in 2019 with 200-plus on-site participants at Rowan University. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, symposium organizers went virtual, presenting a daylong livestream, which attracted an international audience of more than 200 online participants.

David Frei, the symposium's co-founder and 2019 keynote speaker, says, “We're thrilled to be back on-site while also engaging a national audience via technology. Our research shows that, on social media and in therapy dog circles, the need for these activities is stronger than ever.”

The symposium is held in tandem with The Shreiber Family Pet Therapy Program, which was funded through a \$3 million gift from Gerry Shreiber, president/CEO of J&J Snack Foods of Pennsauken, New Jersey. It's scheduled in conjunction with the Kennel Club of Philadelphia’s (KCP) annual, National Dog Show. This year, that Philly show will take place Nov. 20-21 at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center in Oaks, Pennsylvania.

Symposium organizers include David, co-host of The National Dog Show Thanksgiving Day on NBC, and Michele Pich, assistant director of The Shreiber Family Pet Therapy Program, adjunct professor and research associate at Rowan University.

Joining David for NBC's broadcasting of the National Dog Show on Nov. 25 is award-winning actor, "Family Feud" show host, former "Seinfeld" television star, winner of "Dancing with the Stars" and purebred dog owner, John O'Hurley, in addition to NBC Sports analyst, Olympics broadcaster and lifelong dog lover, Mary Carillo. The show, celebrating its 20th year, will be aired from noon to 2 p.m. Organizers indicated it's the most widely viewed dog show in America.

David, an internationally-known canine expert and member of the Kennel Club of Philadelphia, is a longtime leader in the therapy dog movement. For 27 years, he was the face and voice of the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show on USA Network and founded the therapy dog nonprofit, Angel on a Leash. He helped introduce therapy dog visitation to major New York City health care facilities, including Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. He also developed and co-hosts the Beverly Hills Dog Show Presented by Purina on NBC. He is a member of the National Dog Show Therapy Dog Ambassador Team with his Brittany Spaniel, Grace.

Michele is a charter member (2012) of the National Dog Show Therapy Dog Ambassador Team with her Staffordshire Terrier, Vivian Peyton.

She operates the Shreiber Family Pet Therapy Program at Rowan University, recruiting, assessing and scheduling certified animal-assisted therapy teams to visit University students, staff and faculty, along with serving the community at COVID-19 vaccine clinics and other events.

The Shreiber Family Pet Therapy Program functions both as an independent department, and also in collaboration with other Rowan University departments, such as both of Rowan's medical schools (CMSRU and SOM), the Autism PATH Program, the Rowan Integrated Special Needs center, other Rowan Wellness Center departments and the Division of Equity & Inclusion.

Michele previously worked at the Penn Vet Ryan Veterinary Hospital at the University of Pennsylvania, served as a veterinary grief counselor and taught courses in the human-animal bond. She is the former co-director of the VetPets Animal Assisted Activities at Penn Vet, as well as working with New Leash on Life-USA, Philadelphia's animal-assisted prisoner re-entry nonprofit.

David and Michele are certified presenters for continuing education credits via the Registry of Approved Continuing Education and the American Association of Veterinary State Boards.

Another symposium speaker will be Carlo Siracusa, DVM, MS, PhD, PennVet Behavioral Veterinary Medicine department head at University of Pennsylvania.

Symposium tickets can be purchased online: [Go.Rowan.edu/TherapyDogSymposium2021](https://www.rowan.edu/TherapyDogSymposium2021)

"Dogs round the edges of our life off. Dogs really do the work of angels." ~John O'Hurley

© Copyright 2021 All Rights Reserved Lifestyle Publications. Call [+1.913.599.4300](tel:+19135994300) for more information.