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Pet project

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Pet project Schweitzer Fellowship supports Hallberg's work

As a child, Rachel Hallberg found consolation during her parents' divorce by spending hours alone with her Welsh Corgi. She recalls how, in sharing her thoughts and fears with her pet, she was in turn reassured by its unconditional love.

Years later, while working in an orphanage in Romania with the International Children's Advocacy Network, Hallberg observed how a group of children who had been emotionally and physically abused because they were HIV positive suddenly developed feelings of confidence and security after adopting two stray dogs as their own.

Says Hallberg, a 2003 Furman graduate, "I've seen countless examples of ways that animals can offer friendship, trust, loyalty and joy in situations otherwise devoid of such emotions."

Over the summer, Hallberg, a graduate student at the Sargent College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences at Boston University, was able to combine her vocational interest in occupational therapy with her love for animals and the outdoors thanks to the support of a prestigious Albert Schweitzer Fellowship. Each year, approximately 125 graduate students from a wide range of schools are named Schweitzer Fellows and receive funding to design and implement community service projects that address specific health needs.

Hallberg, who majored in health and exercise science at Furman, worked with Animals As Intermediaries, a non-profit organization in Concord, Mass., that encourages interaction between people with physical and psychological disabilities and the natural world. Working in nursing homes, adult day centers, a veteran's

hospital and a school for children with physical disabilities, she developed nature-based programs for individuals with limited access to the outdoors. She also conducted research into clinical evidence that could strengthen AAI's grant proposals, raised funds and prepared informational materials for AAI volunteers.

Hallberg worked with everything from dogs to chinchillas, hedgehogs, hermit crabs, worms, a praying mantis, eels and turtles. The idea, she says, was to bring entire "environments" to the areas she visited — for example, plants, rocks, sand, shells and water might be used to assemble a beach, along with related animals (like lobsters). Music, poetry and art helped set the mood and connect the participants to the environment. Other types of animals would also be brought in to interact directly with patients.

"I think animals possess a therapeutic value that is underappreciated in typical medical and educational settings," says Hallberg. "They often bring back memories of past pets to people who have memory impairments and of familiar experiences to people completely removed from their homes."

At Furman, Hallberg says her vocational plans were fueled in part by her volunteer efforts with the Heller Collegiate Educational Service Corps, where she worked with children and adults with disabilities. She adds, "I learned about occupational therapy through an internship with the Kidnetics pediatric therapy program of the Greenville Hospital System. When I taught swimming to a child with profound physical and cognitive disabilities for my motor development course, I knew I wanted to pursue pediatric OT and help



Rachel Hallberg with her friend Pete.

children with special needs develop skills for living."

Hallberg, who is from Greenville, N.C., is scheduled to receive her master's degree in May, then engage in two three-month clinical affiliations (in Atlanta and in Kinston, N.C.) before taking the national examination and becoming a licensed occupational therapist. As a Schweitzer "Fellow for Life," she will attend monthly meetings through April and participate in fellowship service days and public health symposia.

Ultimately, she hopes to train and match service/companion dogs for children with physical disabilities. She adds, "I would also love to work with a therapy dog to offer services for post-institutionalized children adopted from other countries."

— Jim Stewart

Sewer District as an engineering associate. ■ **Robyn Bennett Guy** of Cumming, Ga., is a quality assurance supervisor for T-Mobile in the software development department. ■ **Jeff Sexton** has been promoted to maintenance/overhauls manager with Lucite International and has been transferred to Beaumont, Texas. ■ **Joey** and **Kristen Patterson Skelton** live in Milwaukee, where she is a clinical pharmacist at St. Luke's Medical Center. He is a fellow in pediatric gastro-

enterology and nutrition at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin and is conducting research in obesity genetics. ■ **Stephane Cline Thornton** of Lakewood, Colo., is an assistant program manager with the Mental Health Corporation of Denver, Inc. She manages case managers and provides therapy for the mentally ill. ■ **MARRIAGE: Derek Peter Van Veen** and **Jennifer Lynn Wallace**, July 17. Both work in Greenville, she as a legal recruiter at BCG Attorney Search and he as clinical director at The Laser

Center. ■ **BIRTHS: Dan and Anne Yaggy Bishop**, a daughter, Daniella Paige, October 9, 2003. They live in Sandwich, Mass.; she is an English teacher and he flies for the U.S. Coast Guard. ■ **Thom and Michelle Martin Burnett**, a daughter, Lucia Joy, May 12. They now live in Greenville. ■ **Bill and Christi Steffes Coverston**, a son, Ryan, May 11, 2003, Charlotte, N.C. Christi received her M.B.A. degree from the University of North Carolina-Charlotte and works with Bank of America as an operations project manager for the

transportation group. ■ **Chad** and **Ginna Lister**, a son, Cameron Smith Lister, May 23, Easley, S.C. Chad has become head basketball coach at North Greenville College. ■ **Matt** and **Amy McKibbin**, a son, Joshua Matthew, April 26, Tallahassee, Fla. Matt is an educational consultant at the University of Florida. ■ **Jeff** and **Suzanne Schwerin Meece**, a daughter, Heather Elizabeth, April 14, Greer, S.C. ■ **Jay** and **Cathie Zachar Rowzie**, a daughter, Sarah Katherine, May 5, South Riding, Va. ■ **Neil** and **Heather**