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## Pet owners line up to bless beloved animals

BY HANNAN ADELY • THE JOURNAL NEWS • SEPTEMBER 15, 2008

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HARTSDALE - Pet owners lined up to get blessings for their dogs, cats and birds at the annual Pet Memorial Day Celebration at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church yesterday.

As each animal approached the front of the line, the Rev. David James made the sign of the cross around their heads and said these words: "May God bless you for all the love and care you bring to those who care for you."

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Cheryl Gross, a veterinarian from Yorktown, said she hoped the blessing would bring good fortune for her golden retriever, Brody.

"It is, hopefully, for good health and happiness and good years to come," she said.

The blessing ceremony was held as part of the 19th annual Pet Memorial Day sponsored by the Hartsdale Pet Cemetery and Crematory, which is known as the oldest pet burial grounds in the United States. In 2000, Hartsdale cemetery officials added blessings to the event to pay tribute to living pets as well as pets who have died.

Pet Memorial Day events are held on the second

Sunday of September by hundreds of participating pet cemeteries around the country every year, said Edward Martin III, vice president of the cemetery.

"It's an open house day where people can come and remember the pets that have meant a lot to them," Martin said.

The event has been held at the cemetery in previous years, but this year the Rev. Joseph Campo of neighboring St. Andrew's Episcopal Church invited the cemetery to hold it on the church lawn next door. Campo said the blessing of animals honored a longtime Christian tradition stemming from the days of St. Francis of Assisi, who was known as a lover of animals and nature.

During the event, Detective Wayne Papovitch of the Greenburgh Police Department's K-9 unit showed off the skills of police dog Patriot in following commands and searching for items. After the blessings, visitors were also welcome into the church hall to view animals that are up for adoption, presented by the national nonprofit organization Shelter Pet Alliance.

Melissa Antiaris of Rye Brook said she has brought her pets to mark Pet Memorial Day in Hartsdale for the past several years. Yesterday, she held onto the leash of her chocolate Labrador and kept an eye on her two Sphynx cats, as she waited for the blessings to begin.

"It makes us feel like our animals are protected," she said.

Reach Hannan Adely at [hadely@lohud.com](mailto:hadely@lohud.com) or 914-696-8456.



The Rev. David James, chaplain of the Hartsdale Pet Cemetery, blesses English springer spaniel Olive. With them is Olive's owner, Gina Antiaris of Rye Brook. Yesterday's event was organized by the Hartsdale Pet Cemetery and Crematory for National Pet Memorial Day at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Hartsdale. (Hannan Adely/The Journal News)

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