

Senior Communities Care for Dogs, Other Animals

Residents help care for the animals daily, and executives attribute health gains to animals' presence.

Posted: January 19, 2008, 5 a.m. EST

Photos courtesy Silverado Senior Living Those in charge of operations at Silverado Senior Living's 16 communities have written a manual of rules for the residents – rules that require at least one dog and one cat for every 25 residents, one bird for every four residents and one aquarium for every 40 residents.

Beyond the 56 dogs, 45 cats and more than 400 fish and birds living with the seniors at the communities, a few extra pets have been added to the mix including a kangaroo, two miniature horses, two pot-bellied pigs, and several rabbits and guinea pigs.

Founded in 1996, Silverado Senior Living cares for those with Alzheimer's, Parkinson's disease, and other dementias at locations in California, Texas, and Utah.

"We all know that pets provide the affection and unconditional love that can brighten seniors' lives," said Loren Shook, Silverado's president and CEO. "But at Silverado, we understand that the positive impact of animals can go even deeper. For example, we involve our residents in caring for the animals on a daily basis.

"Helping to walk, groom, and feed them increases our residents' feelings of self-esteem and worth because they feel they are being productive. This is tremendously important, because it's so easy for those with memory impairment to feel helpless and unworthy and become depressed as a result."

Shook attributes some of the residents' health gains to the animals' presence, including those who have regained the ability to walk, talk, and feed themselves as well as those who have recovered from depression.

Most of the animals at the facilities have been adopted from rescue groups, and the organization spends approximately \$500,000 a year for their care.