

## Zachary is scouting for pet food

by John Howell

05.19.11 - 02:44 pm



Zachary Perkins is on a mission to help those who have difficulty paying what it takes to feed their pets.

The Pilgrim senior, who will attend Providence College this fall, is the second Boy Scout in the pursuit of an Eagle Badge to come to the assistance of Food Four Paws. Paws was formed by Kent Hospital employees when they learned elderly being served by the

Meals on Wheels program were giving their meals to their pets because they couldn't afford to buy pet food.

Since it was formed about two years ago, Paws has collected and given away 18,000 pounds of pet food, says Donna Tracey of Kent. Tracey was joined by others from the hospital and representatives from Hands That Heal to help Perkins get across his message to shoppers at Pets Supply Plus at Garden City.

Perkins has already collected 600 pounds of pet food, a number he hopes to double in his Eagle Scout service project. If he succeeds, he'll surpass the 1,025 pounds Nicholas Thompson collected in donations for Paws for his service project.

But this is not a contest to see who can collect the most.

Perkins is looking forward as he and other members of Lakewood Troop 49 deliver the donations and meet the people and pets he's looking to help.

"I want to see their expressions. This is so rewarding to do this," he said.

Perkins has firsthand knowledge of the importance of pets, although he confesses his home is a bit of a "zoo." Cats are his favorite – the family has three. A dog is also part of the Perkins household as well as two chinchillas, two guinea pigs and 28 or 29 – Perkins isn't sure – birds. For a while they had two pet rats, "but they died," said Perkins.

Perkins' display just inside Pets Supply included a plastic tub for those willing to make a donation of food and a table with displays of Sweeners chocolate bars and other goodies for cash donations.

The money would be used to buy pet food and kitty litter that is a top priority at this time, said Tracey.

Elaine Birrell, president of Hands That Heal, said the recession has seriously impacted the ability of many people to care for their pets. Following a recent

Channel 10 story about the organization, Birrell said the phone hasn't stopped ringing. Most calls are from those looking for assistance, although there are also some from people wanting to help.

The economic stress has forced some people to give up or abandon their pets.

"Shelters are full," she said, "the whole thing is to keep them with their owners."

Perkins praised the staff at Pets Supply for allowing him to solicit within the store. He feels all gain by the effort. Pets Supply sells food, pet owners get to feed their pets and awareness of the need is increased.

Those wanting to assist Perkins reach his goal can reach him at his home, 132 Hiawatha St. off Post Road behind St. Williams Church.

And he's anxious to start helping. For one, says his mother Lu Ann, he's running out of space in his room to keep all the food.