

## Meijer Team Gives Supports West Michigan Therapy Dogs

Since 2021, Meijer Team Gives annually empowers Meijer store and distribution facility team members to work together to select and donate to nonprofits meaningful to them and their local communities.

During a recent Meijer Team Gives campaign, each store and distribution facility was given \$5,000 to donate to one nonprofit in their community. The team at our Grand Rapids distribution center chose West Michigan Therapy Dogs (WMTD), a nonprofit organization that's provided West Michigan with Animal Assisted Activities (AAA) since 2001. WMTD partners with healthcare and senior care facilities, education organizations and other places, such as courthouses, libraries and airports throughout the five counties surrounding Grand Rapids.

Through a committee headed by Charles Williams, DC90 Operations Supervisor, the selection process lasted a few weeks and included informative presentations so team members could learn about each organization under consideration.

"It's really about involving the people out on the floor," said Charles, who's been with Meijer for 18 years. "We let the whole team vote on what they think would be the best way to distribute the funds. And West Michigan Therapy Dogs was a unanimous decision."

To Charles' surprise, WMTD doesn't have a homebase. Instead, it operates with more than 150 individual teams each comprised of volunteer owners and their dogs. From young children to the elderly, WMTD impacts many communities annually, supporting both customers and staff of its partnered organizations.

"I felt like there was a big need with them," Charles said. "They are doing a lot of good work. It was a joy for us to be able to help."

WMTD provides an eight-week training course, as well as re-issue classes for certified teams every two years so owners and their dogs can maintain a sharp skillset. Thanks to Meijer, the funds continue to help the organization pay rent for the space that holds their classes and certification sessions. Their current space is adequate, but WMTD is actively looking for other spaces that hold more storage for their equipment.

"We're all volunteers, simple as that," said Paula Nelson, WMTD President. "And this year, we're receiving more requests for visits than we can staff so we gratefully appreciate Meijer for their support in helping us in maintaining a space to train more dogs in order to spread more animal-assisted therapy across West Michigan."

When team members delivered the check to WMTD at Gerald R. Ford International Airport in Grand Rapids, Mich., coincidentally, it was a busy day of cancelled flights, leading to many upset travelers. Charles recalled his experience getting to see the dogs in action.

"It was really intriguing to watch them walk around and see all the different people they interact with," he said. "The dogs were so good with them. It was awesome."

Charles recently celebrated his one-year anniversary at Meijer DC90 and looks forward to the next Meijer Team Gives so he can see and experience the team's impact.

"I wouldn't mind doing it again, it's a worthy cause," he said. "They [WMTD] were really happy to get the funds and we were even more happy to come out to the airport, meet some of the dogs and owners and ultimately, give to this great organization."

Learn more about West Michigan Therapy Dogs [here](#).

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