

# Delta Society Hosts Leaders from Botswana, South Africa

By JoAnn Turnbull & Niki Kuklenski  
Photos by Tatsuki Kobayashi

**O**n April 4, 2008, a contingent of forty government, business and community leaders from Botswana, South Africa visited Delta Society's international headquarters in Bellevue, WA. They were in the United States to learn how peoples' passions can lead to innovation and success in the U.S. corporate and non-profit sectors.

During their three-hour visit at Delta Society the group gained an appreciation for the healing powers of companion animals. They learned of numerous research studies which have proven that the presence of animals can lower blood pressure, reduce stress and stimulate the release of endorphins. They were exposed to Delta Society's Pet Partners program in which specially trained volunteers take their animals to interact and positively impact the health and well-being of hospitalized patients, seniors, individuals with AIDS, children who are learning to read, and much more. The highlight of the morning was clearly when they met Delta Society Pet Partner and Bellingham resident Niki Kuklenski and her two llamas – Isle Eagle and Marisco

Admittedly some guests were having a bit of a struggle relating to the importance we place on household pets, but that didn't stop the message from getting across. As one delegate noted, "Now that I think about it, when my uncle was in a hospital his motivation to get better was

that he wanted to go home to be with his cattle." While the species may differ, this is further evidence that, despite cultural differences, the human-animal bond exists. While it may at times not appear as prevalent, with on-going education the benefits animals provide their humans companions can only become more widely known around the globe. Delta Society was honored for having been asked to be part of this multi-cultural learning experience.

Delta Society is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization with a mission to improve human health through service and therapy animals. Currently there are over 10,000 registered Pet Partner teams across the USA and in eleven other countries. To learn more about Delta Society and their Pet Partners program visit [www.deltasociety.org](http://www.deltasociety.org).

## Notes from Niki:

It was really an honor to be part of this amazing presentation. I was invited into the boardroom first with my one male llama, "Marisco." I answered questions about whether he bites, spits and what I do with him. While there I talked about my experiences volunteering at a home for HIV positive men and at various schools and nursing homes around my area. Following my portion of the presentation, a dog therapy team was brought in to talk too.

The men and women of Botswana were very appreciative of my bringing both my therapy llamas to meet them. One man even got out his camera to show me some camels he saw at a zoo in Botswana. Both male llamas stood quietly for pictures and petting by everyone there.



My friends Lenore and Tatsuki Kobayashi came to help out. Lenore handled Marisco, while I worked with Eagle. Tatsuki is an amazing photographer and shot various pictures of everything going on. They both are highly involved with Delta Society utilizing their dog pet partners. I credit them for getting me involved with my two llamas in the Summer of 2006.

This was actually our second invitation to be involved with Delta Society's public relations work. In the Fall of 2006 we were invited to a presentation with a Japanese magazine who was doing a feature on "Americans and their pets."

I would encourage anybody with a love of animals, and a gift of sharing them, to consider becoming a therapy partner. The joy you give others is like nothing you can imagine! If you have questions or want more information on this work with llamas, please contact me directly.

**CQ**

## About the Author

*Niki Kuklenski and her husband Jeff are very involved with all aspects of owning llamas. She is a 4-H leader and teacher. Niki and Jeff drive, show, pack and educate with their llamas. Niki's passion is llama history and memorabilia. She spends most of her free time tracking down old pictures and llama owners to help preserve our industry's history.*

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