

## **Dogs Training People!**

by Marie Tiraschi

As many of the "old timers" know, I joined SCDTC in 1980 with my one-year-old Boxer, Sheba. After earning her UD degree, she had a bout with cancer, recovered, but it slowed her down and I retired her from the obedience ring at age 6.

Wondering what I could do with Sheba as she enjoyed life and people, I talked to a woman who was using her dogs in pet therapy work. So, in 1983 I began unofficially using Sheba as a therapy dog, and in 1986, she became a registered therapy dog through the Humane Society Silicon Valley's Hug-a-Pet program. Over the years, and many dogs later, I still continue doing my therapy dog visits at an assisted living facility. Both Hana and Buster have been tested and certified therapy dogs through tests provided by SCDTC. (I have become an evaluator/tester and trainer for therapy programs.)

One of the benefits of having therapy dogs and now being employed at Humane Society Silicon Valley, is that I have evolved from only doing therapy dog visits into visiting classrooms and doing presentations to children of all ages although I usually get the wee ones (ages 2 - 6 years of age). Hana, Buster and I go into the classrooms teaching the children and adults about being respectful to animals, what animals need to be happy, and how to be safe around animals. One of the benefits of having well-trained dogs is that these schools and HSSV are happy to have us visit, and it shows all the benefits of training a pet. My dogs have given so much to me as well as to the children and adults we meet.

After 23 years, I still enjoy giving back to society with volunteering to do this work. Why? Why not is my answer to the question. We have dogs that we train and show, but there still are so many people who own pets and do not treat them well. We have a society of people who do not treat each other well. (Trust me...in my line of work I have seen things that you would never think would happen to a pet in our communities). I think that if I can make a difference to one child, that child will pass it on to others, and from there, who knows. Maybe there will be one less dog bite suffered by a child knowing how to approach (ask first) a dog. Maybe there will be one less act of cruelty to an animal because the teenager knows where to go for help vs. taking it out on the pet. And just maybe there will be one adult who can give of their time to help out with educating children and my circle grows. What we have learned is that the earlier a child is reached out to about acting kind and respectful, the more likely the child will retain this behavior as an adult.

My own sons, who came with me on my therapy dogs visits, are living proof. While they do not currently own dogs, both have learned to visit and share stories with the elderly. One son helps his wife with horses that are used in therapeutic riding programs for children and veterans. The other son gives of his time as a "big brother" to a 13-year-old boy with cerebral palsy. So by exhibiting acts of kindness and respect to children, they grow up to be respectful adults not only to humans but also to pets as well. If you are interested in learning more about educational programs for children and animals, the Humane Society Silicon Valley has many fabulous programs for all ages.

If you wish to know about what programs are available or if you would like more information, please let me know. The HSSV website for educational programs is [www.hssv.org](http://www.hssv.org) and click on "Education".