

The Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare Foundation COMMUNITY UPDATE

March / April 2016

ENCOUNTERING RIKKI: THE BOOK

She has been called “an angel,” and her uncanny ability to decipher the one human in a crowd who most needs rescuing has many people agreeing.

Therapy dog Rikki, who has been quietly serving alongside her human partners, Chuck and Patty Mitchell, through the Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy program, is now the star of a book, “Encounters with Rikki: from Hurricane Katrina rescue to exceptional therapy dog.” Authored by Tallahassee native Julie Strauss Bettinger, it was published this past January.

“Bettinger tells of the moving journey of Chuck Mitchell and therapy dog Rikki in their advocacy for young victims of abuse and patients with severe and debilitating illnesses. Their story heartfully captures the amazing power animals have to lift the human spirit.”

— **BARBARA NATTERSON, MD, PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE,
UCLA DIVISION OF CARDIOLOGY**

“I feel like the magician’s assistant,” says Chuck Mitchell, who has worked with Rikki to help patients at the Tallahassee Memorial Rehabilitation Center, the Florida State Hospital for the mentally ill in Chattahoochee as well as the courts. His wife, Patty, has witnessed similar transformations in children struggling to read. Some have advanced as many as three grade levels while reading to Rikki.

“Encounters with Rikki” chronicles the true story of how Rikki survived Hurricane Katrina and came to live with Chuck and Patty Mitchell. After Chuck noticed her innate abilities to comfort hurting people, they began training together as a therapy team. Together, their visits continue to bring healing and hope to recovering patients, accident victims and the mentally ill.

Animal Therapy is a hot topic; there are numerous stories in the popular press and a number of books written about it. “Encounters with Rikki”



*Left to Right:
Animal Therapy
volunteers
Bobbie Jo Finer,
Ellen Pearson,
Chuck Mitchell,
Animal Therapy
graduate
student Sydney
Hanselman and
Rikki*



Rikki with Chuck Mitchell and author Julie Strauss Bettinger

focuses primarily on a specialty that has emerged, using dogs to comfort children when they must testify in court – many times against their sexual abuser or as a witness to a crime against a sibling or parent. Legal cases with child witnesses are a closely guarded world with rules, procedures and protocols. In the name of justice, a child as young as four years old must recall facts about an event the child has desperately tried to forget. The young witness must come face-to-face with an adult who introduced terror into their storybook world. The entire drama typically takes place against a backdrop of linoleum floors, hard wooden benches and somber moods.

Yet, under the influence of therapy dogs, this same frightened, wary child who is having trouble recalling facts becomes relaxed and able to think more clearly. The dog becomes a tool to build rapport between the child and attorneys, to get to the truth during depositions, hearings and trials.

“Encounters with Rikki” captures the story of how the gifted canine inspired a law to allow dogs to enter the courtroom. Florida became the first state in the nation to pass such a law in 2011, and it has paved the way for many other states to allow therapy dogs to comfort victims in their courtrooms as well.

TMH has one of the largest Animal Therapy programs in the country, now with 145 teams, including four parrots, two dwarf mini horses, one horse and numerous cats and dogs. The program’s largest dog is three times larger than its smallest horse.

Teams are regularly requested (by children and/or the presiding judge) to be present at final adoption hearings and in dependency court. They visit expectant moms at TMH and those who are in their final days of life at

Story continued on page 6.

PROTOCOLS FOR PHILANTHROPY

A Healthy Estate Plan in 2016



Paula S. Fortunas
President/CEO
TMH Foundation

As we move toward the second quarter of 2016, it is an excellent time to review our respective estate plans – making sure they are healthy and provide appropriately for the well being of our families and the charitable organizations we hold dear. Here are some suggestions.

Meet with your financial advisor to review your assets and liabilities in order to determine your current net worth, how much to save for retirement and the status of your life insurance policies and any other holdings.

Meet with your attorney to create or conform to your current financial status your last will and testament and associated documents such as a revocable living trust; a healthcare power of attorney to ensure that someone you trust makes medical decisions on your behalf; a living will to formalize your wishes regarding prolonged healthcare and terminal conditions and a financial power of attorney to ensure that someone will handle your financial decisions if you are unable to do so. Further, you will want to establish guardianships for your minor children should the need arise and encourage your adult family members to prepare their own estate plans.

Note: The contents of this article and any materials you request and receive from TMHF are general in nature and are not intended as either legal, financial or tax advice. You should consult your own professional advisors before making a final decision with respect to gift plans and agreements.

Select the charitable organizations you want to support and include them in your estate plan. Of course, it is our hope that the Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare Foundation (TMHF) will be among them. TMHF stands ready to help you achieve your personal and charitable goals and objectives by providing gift plans that benefit you and your family and highlighting immediate and deferred tax advantages for you and your heirs, resulting in your meaningful impact on Tallahassee Memorial beyond your own lifetime and far into the future.

Please consider the TMHF website, www.TMH.ORG/Foundation, as your resource for charitable giving information. Explore the site and learn about the many opportunities to support Tallahassee Memorial.

To Make a Secure Online Donation

Please visit TMH.ORG/Foundation and click on **DONATE NOW**

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ENCOUNTERING RIKKI: THE BOOK *continued*

Big Bend Hospice. Program Manager Stephanie Perkins estimates that teams had 40,000 therapeutic interactions last year alone.

Currently, the Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy program serves over 60 facilities and has a waiting list for others. They often host visiting groups inquiring about Animal Therapy, including China and Ukraine, through the Ghazvini Center for Healthcare Education. There's an ongoing effort to educate medical students, physicians and nurses about the benefits of Animal Therapy. "Encounters with Rikki" will help in that effort and the author has committed 20 percent of the royalties to benefit the Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy program.

In January, Tallahassee Memorial and the TMH Foundation sponsored two gatherings to launch the book – one for TMH colleagues, as they

witness the work of therapy teams day-to-day, and one for the general public. The latter was hosted at the TMH Rehabilitation Center, where Rikki and Chuck visit weekly to work with patients. The Mitchells attended the signings with Rikki, and books were autographed by the author as well as "pawtographed" by Rikki. Local retailers Hearth & Soul and Naturally Healthy Pet, also hosted book signings, as did The Bookshelf in Thomasville, Georgia.

Books can be purchased at retailers that hosted signings, as well as the TMH Gift Shop and the TMH Foundation. It's also available through all major booksellers including Amazon, and through the publisher at Inkshares.com. For more information, please visit EncountersWithRikki.com or TMH.ORG/AnimalTherapy.



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