

# Kemp Financial Management

Client Corner January 2014

## Bob and Bella

*(This article was written by Grace Wong and appeared in The Daily Breeze on December 18, 2013. To view the article on The Daily Breeze, go to <http://www.dailybreeze.com/general-news/20131218/torrance-resident-robert-chiota-and-his-pal-bella-bring-comfort-to-those-in-need>)*

With big black eyes, smooth brown hair and a sweet demeanor, Bella truly lives up to her name.

“People always tell me what a pretty girl she is,” says Robert Chiota of the beagle. “She has the softest ears.”

Bella is Chiota’s pet as well as a therapy dog at Torrance Memorial Medical Center, where the duo visit patients on the second Tuesday of every month.

Chiota said Bella is a delight to many people who may be suffering from chronic diseases and welcome her interruption.

“Some people like having her sit on a chair or on the floor,” said Chiota, a Torrance resident. “But I remember this one man who would hug her and point to her and say that she was his chemotherapy. I’ll never forget that.”

The 73-year-old Vietnam War veteran first found out about the possibility of volunteering with Bella through his wife, Irma.

“She is such a sweet dog and she has such a wonderful personality,” Irma Chiota said. “She’s very mellow, which is very much like my husband, so I thought why not get the two together and go volunteer at the hospital.”



Bob Chiota and Bella. Photo Credit: Chuck Bennett – Staff Photographer for the Daily Breeze

After seeing Bella, some patients change from being withdrawn to affectionate, petting Bella and talking to her, Robert Chiota said. The beagle has been so popular that hospital staffers know to have carrots on hand, since they are her favorite.

“It’s not just the patients who love her,” Chiota said. “It’s literally unbelievable. I can’t get in the room where she is because it’s full of staff and visitors and family members. She just has that effect. It’s wonderful.”

Each time Chiota goes to the hospital, he meets people in the hallways or in the elevator who ask him to visit their family member’s bedside. There is even a list of patients who ask for dog visitations, many of whom have dogs at home.

“We have a dog here almost every day,” said Mary Matson, director of volunteer and guest services. “The dogs are very intuitive and they can pick up on things that we can’t. There are so many stories about that and I could tell you of all the times they have had breakthroughs with patients.”

Chiota’s volunteerism doesn’t just involve Bella. He also volunteers with United Service Organizations, a nonprofit that provides programs, services and entertainment to the military, and assists with Families of the Fallen, a USO program that helps to provide a “dignified transfer” in transporting deceased service people and their families. He is also a Community Emergency Response Team member, making him fully trained to help people in need when the next big earthquake hits California.

A favorite project is installing bocce courts in Torrance and making them wheelchair-accessible.

“This is an activity that people who are recovering from operations and injuries can do,” Chiota said. “They can throw this ball around, walk in the open air and have a great time and get better.”

To complete his project, Chiota is trying to raise \$50,000 purely from donations. So far, he has raised a little more than \$11,000.

And if that isn’t enough, he helps Anza Elementary School’s first-grade students with their reading.

But he’s not worried about leaving Bella at home by herself.

“She sleeps all the time — 15 to 17 hours a day,” Chiota said. “When we go work at the hospital together, we’re impacting her sleep schedule.”



**Photo Credit: Chuck Bennett – Staff  
Photographer for the Daily Breeze**