

Therapists unleashed

Poodles bring smiles in visits to schools, nursing homes

BY MELISSA ROLLINS
Morning News
mrollins@florencenews.com

FLORENCE — If their smiling faces are any indication, Bentley and Bug enjoy their jobs, if snuggling can be considered a job.

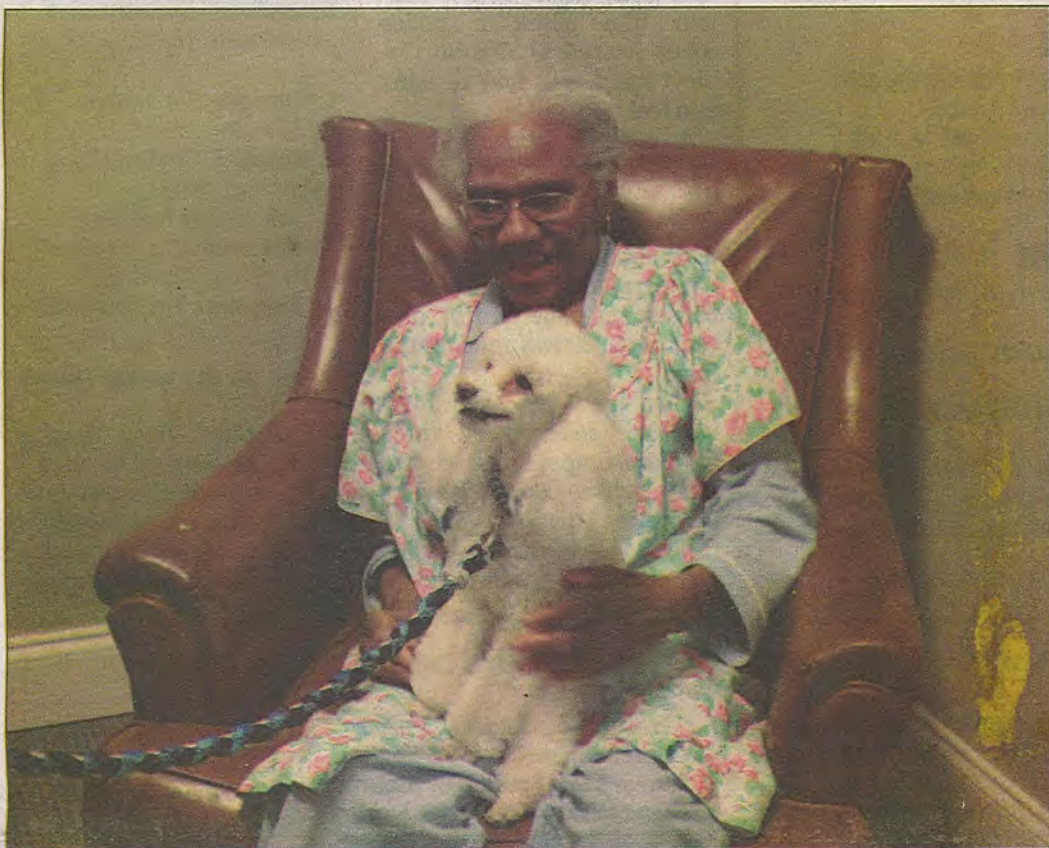
The two male toy poodles make weekly visits with their owners, David and Margi Moore, to several Florence nursing homes, as well as to McLeod Children's Hospital and Delmae Elementary School, working as therapy dogs.

Margi and Bug visit a first-grade classroom at Delmae on Tuesdays, taking one-on-one time reading with each student in the class. Margi said the child gets to choose what book he or she wants to read.

"Clifford is very popular," Margi said. "I guess the kids think that Bug wants to read about dogs. It is a proven fact that reading comprehension improves when they read to the dog. We go to an empty classroom, and the children read their book to him. They know that the dog isn't going to laugh at them; it is less intimidating than reading to the whole class. I always hated that."

Margi said she is there as moral support for the children and does not correct them if they read something wrong. Being assigned to a single class, however, she gets to see the how much students change during the school year.

"It is great to get to be with the same kids for a whole year," Margi said. "To watch the improvement in those kids from the beginning to the



MELISSA ROLLINS/MORNING NEWS

Pee Dee Gardens resident Thelma Brayboy pets Bug, a dog owned by David and Margi Moore. Bug comes to the senior-living community as a therapy animal.



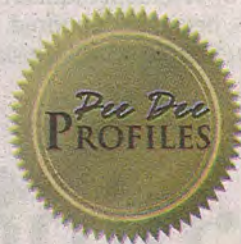
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

David Moore and his dog Bentley visit with Pee Dee Gardens resident Joe Reino.

end, it's just amazing."

David and Bentley visit McLeod Children's Hospital once a week. David said that

because the dog is small, even children who are afraid of dogs tend to end up petting him by the end of the visit.



Each Monday, the Morning News features a good news story on a person, place or organization in the Pee Dee. If you have a suggestion for someone or something to profile, send it to news@scnow.com.

"We visited one child that was backed up as far away from the dog as he could be while lying in his bed," David said. "By the time we had to leave, he was sitting up cross-legged in the bed and Bentley was in his lap."

Though they have their

See **THERAPY**, Page 4A

Therapy

From Page 1A

separate therapy trips, the dogs also visit several local nursing homes and assisted-living facilities together.

The Moores said that sometimes the dogs are therapy just as much for the nurses and staff as they are for the patients, residents and students.

"Those jobs can be

stressful," Margi said. "Seeing the dogs might be the bright spot of their day."

On a recent trip to Pee Dee Gardens, more than one resident squealed when they were told that the dogs were there to visit them. It was easy to see that the visit is something they look forward to.

"One of our residents likes to sit in her room, stay in her room, all day long," said Carly Yaken, director of activities for

Pee Dee Gardens. "This is one activity that she just loves. I have recently been able to get her out to do more things, but I really think the dogs are what started that. She made a connection with the dogs, and with me, so when they aren't here, she is more excited to come out and do an activity."

David and Margi let each dog have a turn sitting on the residents' laps. While the dogs are being petted, the Moores talk with the residents about their families and whether they used to have a dog themselves.

One part of the Pee Dee Garden visit that is especially meaningful for

Margi is when they visit the Memory Care area, where residents who have Alzheimer's or dementia live.

"My mom and grandmother both had Alzheimer's," Margi said. "One of the residents actually reminds me of my mother."

Aside from doing the

work necessary to certify their dogs as therapy animals, the Moores also take part in fly-ball and agility competitions, including the one held in Florence at the Eastern Agricultural Fairgrounds. They also have another dog, a black poodle, who does not work as a therapy dog.

