

**For Immediate Release**  
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## **A RARE BREED OF HOSPICE CARE**

When Wendy Hirschman bought a puppy seven years ago, she had no idea that it would lead to hospice volunteer work. Her dog, Piccollo, is a white Bolognese, a rare miniature breed. Wendy chose this breed because of her son's allergy problems with other types of dogs. Bolognese have hair instead of fur and shed very little.

The name of the breed comes from the Italian city of Bologna, where centuries ago Bolognese enjoyed great popularity among the Medici rulers. Bolognese were also favorites with the Hapsburgs, Romanovs, and other royal courts of Europe, but the breed nearly became extinct when rule by royalty ended. Wendy estimates that there are fewer than 400 Bolognese in the United States.

A dog trainer suggested to Wendy that Piccollo would be an ideal therapy dog because of his keen intelligence, gentle disposition, and affectionate nature. Piccollo completed the training needed to become a Certified Therapy Dog and is registered with Therapy Dogs International. Part of the training therapy dogs receive is to help them become comfortable around wheelchairs, walkers, and elevators, and not to eat medication that is dropped on the floor.

Wendy began volunteering with Ann's Haven VNA in Denton a year ago and now visits patients at a nearby nursing home. She brings a lap blanket and brush on these visits because patients oftentimes enjoy grooming Piccollo. Piccollo also performs tricks for patients.

Wendy has observed the soothing and calming affect Piccollo has on patients. "Piccollo has such a sweet temperament that patients easily take to him," Wendy says. She has seen patients who were unresponsive to humans reciprocate the attention given to them by Piccollo. "Piccollo has a way of bringing people out of their isolation," she notes.

Wendy moved to Denton County 1½ years ago with her husband and two sons, and

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will soon begin doing volunteer work for VNA in Collin County. “I get as much out of the visits as do the patients,” Wendy states. “They help put life’s challenges in perspective. Day-to-day problems don’t seem so big anymore,” she adds.

Information about volunteering with Ann’s Haven VNA can be obtained by contacting Ginny Hudson, hospice volunteer coordinator, at 940-349-5900, 1-800-383-5435, or [hudsong@vnatexas.org](mailto:hudsong@vnatexas.org).



**Wendy Hirschman and her Bolognese, Piccolo, visit patients for Anns' Haven VNA in Denton.**

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