

## Buddy and Leslie offer smiles, cuddles, and happiness

Peninsula native and Brisbane resident Leslie Davis set out to adopt a dog in March 2019. She says she didn't care about breed or gender. "I just wanted a happy dog."

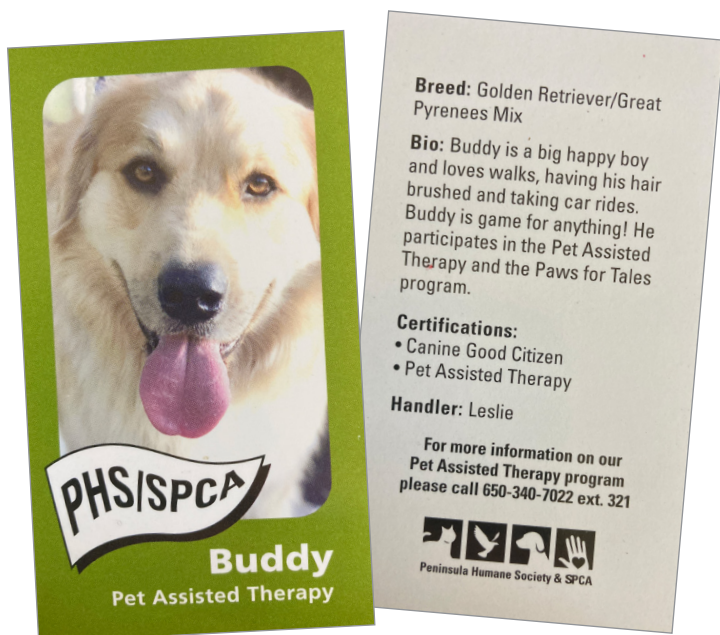
When she saw Buddy, a 1.5-year-old Golden Retriever/Great Pyrenees mix, she knew the happy, gentle giant was the one. From their very first walk together, she says, "He has to say hi to everyone - he loves people." And people love him - kids will come running to say hi when they see him around town.

One of Leslie's friends was a pet assisted therapy volunteer with the Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA (PHS/SPCA) in Burlingame. "She told me how gratifying it is," says Leslie, "and I thought 'that's Buddy's calling!'"

With help (and transportation) from Leslie, Buddy has turned his joy into a job he loves. Once the duo completed their training with PHS/SPCA, Leslie and Buddy signed up to visit people in assisted living facilities and young readers at the Westlake Branch Library in Daly City.

Marivic Dizon, coordinator of the PHS/SPCA Pet Assisted Therapy program, suggested they also consider visiting hospice patients, and Leslie loved the idea. She'd seen how much her family benefited from hospice care when her sister and dad needed care. "I found it so graceful, and I wanted to give back."

So Marivic put Leslie in touch with Craig Schroeder, our Director of Volunteer Services, and over the following months, Leslie completed our Direct Care Volunteer training.



*Buddy and Leslie trained with the Peninsula Humane Society/SPCA and Mission Hospice. Together, they now visit patients in their homes and at Mission House - as well as other places around the Peninsula. Buddy's business card is at left.*

Leslie and Buddy now visit Mission Hospice patients weekly in their homes and at Mission House. "It's so nice to see people smile while we're there. We're bringing happiness."

"When a pet team visits a patient," Craig explains, "they offer unconditional love. The look in a patient's eyes when a pet visits is nothing but joy and connection. It can be the highlight of their week."

There's science behind this connection, says Marivic. "When you pet an animal - especially a dog - it can help lower your blood pressure and heart rate, reduce stress, and increase feel-good hormones like oxytocin."

*...continued on back*



# Wowed by hospice house, Stacy Blanchard joins board of directors



Stacy Blanchard, her husband Joel, and their two daughters live in Redwood City just a few blocks from our hospice house. They had never heard of Mission House and had no idea that it would come to play such a role in their family.

For two decades, following a major back surgery, Joel's dad Ron had suffered from a rare kind of viral encephalitis that led to brain trauma in the frontal lobe. He retired to enjoy a life of travel, golf, and time with his children and their families, but due to Ron's heavy medication requirements, speech and memory loss, and seizures, his wife Helen became his full-time caregiver. After Ron's 80th birthday, his falls became more frequent and his body was unable to handle the impact. For Helen, caregiving felt even more overwhelming.

When it was clear that he was ready for hospice and it was no longer practical for Ron to stay at home, his nurses at Sequoia mentioned Mission House as an option. It was a relief to the whole family.

"From the time we walked in, it was so calm, so welcoming," says Stacy. "The house was warm and peaceful; his room was beautiful and comfortable. The staff are professionals, but they make it feel like home." Stacy had been through a number of very personal losses, and says she'd never before had this feeling when walking into a care facility. "As soon as you come through the door, you feel like family," she says.

In the several weeks that Ron was at Mission House, his extended family was there every day, even taking Ron out in a wheelchair for walks in the neighborhood. They enjoyed having a private entrance to the garden, where they could have lunch together while Ron slept, and could step outside when someone simply needed space or air. Stacy says they appreciated how attentive and loving the staff were – towards Ron as well as the family. "It was such personalized care," says Stacy. "He was never alone, even when we needed to take a break."

Stacy says the house allowed them to spend meaningful time together as a family. "Ron really loved music. One night, we played some of his favorite music and we all sang together. He just loved that – and so did my mother-in-law. It was a great way to spend the moments we had left with him."

After Ron's death, Stacy says the Mission House team performed a ceremony that brought her family to tears.

"I had never seen anything like that. Just when you think these amazing people have given us as soft a landing as you can give anyone, here they come with rose petals and music. We thought we had no more tears left, but we cried again. It was so special, and we are so thankful."

This experience with Mission House inspired Stacy to get involved. As a Senior Managing Director at Accenture, she advises healthcare organizations and leaders on strategy and transformation. Her background made her a perfect fit for our Board of Directors, and in May, she was elected to the board along with Mukund Acharya and Dr. Michelle Pezzani.



*Ron's entire extended family, including his grandchildren, gathered with him at Mission House in his final weeks. His daughter-in-law Stacy was so impressed with his care, she joined our Board of Directors.*

Stacy is thrilled to be part of the team, and passionate about spreading the word about Mission Hospice. She's dedicated to educating people about end of life and palliative care, choices in caregiving, and advocating for your loved ones. "People need to know that they have options – and access to this amazing care right here in our community." 🍌



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## Meet IT Specialist Ashton Fulwood



**Joined Mission Hospice:** 2014

**Grew up:** South San Francisco and San Francisco

**Family:** A lot of my family members were in some way part of the Armed Forces. My dad was in the Marines, and my grandpa, uncle, and brother were in the Army.

**Hobbies:** I like writing, traveling, telling stories, tinkering with computers, and mystery and horror related material.

**Reading:** *Malazan Book of the Fallen* series by Steven Erikson - I'm currently on Book 3, *Memories of Ice*.

**Desert island album:** *Tha Carter III* by Lil Wayne

**Favorite movie:** *The Book of Eli*

**Little known fact:** When I was in my 20s, my hair was long enough to have braids.

**On my bucket list:** I plan to visit at least five more countries before the end of the decade.

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To support Mission Hospice & Home Care into the coming decades, consider an estate gift. Members of our Legacy Society are invited to special events and help give patients quality care and support at the end of life.

For information, contact Marsha Eddleman at 650.554.1000 or [meddleman@MissionHospice.org](mailto:meddleman@MissionHospice.org).



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Mission Hospice & Home Care serves patients and families in the San Francisco Peninsula and South Bay with personalized, compassionate end-of-life care and education. Founded in 1979, our local, independent nonprofit has supported thousands of patients and their families through illness and bereavement. Donations from the community support our exceptional care and educational programs, and help us serve people regardless of their medical coverage or ability to pay.

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**INSIDE:** Pet therapy team delivers happiness  
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**Buddy and Leslie...** *continued from front*

During a visit at Mission House, Leslie says one patient asked if Buddy could come up on the bed with her. At 104 pounds, Buddy (who is not allowed on the furniture at home) got right up on the bed and snuggled with her. The woman even asked for her phone so she could take selfies with him.

Craig says that Leslie and Buddy are among a handful of Mission Hospice pet therapy teams – and there's a great demand for more. He explains that most of our pet therapy volunteers come through our partnership with PHS/SPCA. "Marivic is very supportive – and really understands what her program can bring hospice patients." Mission Hospice also works with Pet Partners, a national nonprofit that trains and supports therapy animal teams.

While the training through PHS/SPCA and Mission Hospice was extensive, Leslie says she's so grateful she signed up for it. And Buddy loves his "job." When Leslie is wearing her PHS shirt and puts on his "therapy dog" bandana, Buddy gets excited because he knows he's "going to work."

"I've found this more rewarding and fulfilling than I ever imagined," says Leslie. "At first I thought I'd be just the chauffeur, but we're truly a team. It's very rewarding to make somebody's day." 🐾

*Both Mission Hospice and the Peninsula Humane Society/SPCA welcome pet therapy teams. For more information, contact Craig Schroeder at 650.532.2323 or [cschroeder@MissionHospice.org](mailto:cschroeder@MissionHospice.org).*



*Buddy is popular in patients' homes and at Mission House – and always brings smiles, cuddles, and happiness.*