



Working like a Dog

Man's best friend? Absolutely. But for some of the Valley's at-risk, abused and neglected youth, therapy dogs are more than just friends, they're angels.

BY: ERIKA RIETZ PHOTOGRAPHY: WERNER SEGARRA

GABE IS A LITTLE bit tired today. The 6-year-old Weimaraner ambles around the front office of Crisis Nursery for a few minutes before lying down next to his owner, Pam Gaber. She scratches his ears and explains that Gabe had a malignant tumor removed last December and just finished chemotherapy. "But now he's back in action," Pam says, and his gray tail thumps happily against the floor. The big, sweet-faced dog is a beloved visitor at Crisis Nursery, a preschool for at-risk, neglected and abused children. He's also the "co-founder" and namesake of Gabriel's Angels, one of the Valley's most unique and widest-reaching non-profit organizations.

It all began four years ago when Pam, a long-time volunteer with Crisis Nursery and Crisis Shelter, decided it might be fun to bring reindeer-clad Gabe to the annual Christmas party. "So I dressed him in antlers, a 'Just call me Rudolph' T-shirt and a big old jingle bell collar," she laughs. "I brought him only because I

thought it would help these children smile... That was the only reason—to let the kids laugh at the goofy dog."

What actually happened was, she says, "magical." "The children were soft and loving and kind; even some of the boys that would just as soon hit and punch were hugging and loving him. [The program director and I] were just staring, like, 'Whoa, what's going on?'"

Time Well Spent

"We're always looking for more teams," says Pam Gaber, founder of **GABRIEL'S ANGELS**. "It's really working with your best friend and watching magic develop through the interactions. It's something everyone should experience." Think your canine companion could be an angel for at-risk, abused or neglected Valley children? Dog owners can join Gabriel's Angels to become certified and then commit to scheduled visits with little tykes. Don't have a pup of your own? Become a Helping Hand and assist therapy teams on weekly visits. www.petshelpingkids.com.