

Outstanding Citizen Award



LINDA SMITH, President & Founder *Rim of the World Comfort Pets*

Linda Smith, President and Founder of Rim of the World Comfort Pets, Inc., makes the world a better place for human beings by harnessing, so to speak, the powerful love and energy of our animal friends and companions. Her non-profit organization's mission is to promote health and improve the quality of life for individuals through the animal-human interactions that come from animal assisted activities and therapy. Certified therapy handler-animal volunteer teams work to help heal individuals, elevate the professional standards in the therapy animal field and promote the general cause of volunteerism.

Ms. Smith is an Air Force veteran and was active duty during the final years of the Vietnam era. In 2004, she retired as an air traffic controller from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Having trained and loved dogs for over 25 years in addition to having owned dogs as a child, she knew it was her calling to become an advocate in the field of volunteer service by connecting therapy dogs with those people who needed them in their lives.

She decided to launch an organization of citizen volunteers to become certified therapy dog handlers with their canine companions. Thus began Rim of the World Comfort Pets in 2006, based in Crestline, California, which gained its 501(c)(3) status in 2014. Therapy dogs are brought in to comfort and assist retirees, residents of skilled nursing homes and assisted living facilities and physically challenged and disabled people including wounded veteran warriors. The pets also work in hospitals, psychiatric wards and shelters. The team conducts many worthwhile programs through school districts, in libraries and at community gatherings to help children grow and learn.

Volunteers are always available to make presentations, march in parades and participate in fairs and dog walks to promote and demonstrate the life-affirming impact of therapy dogs and volunteer service. Pet therapists are in great demand, and there is a serious shortage of therapy dogs. Rim of the World Comfort Pets, Inc. trains, evaluates, tests and qualifies owners and their well-behaved dogs as therapy dog teams. These teams provide unconditional love, boost self-esteem and relieve loneliness and boredom, bringing benefits such as lower blood pressure in people.

Ms. Smith is certified to test therapy dogs for the national therapy dog organization *The Bright and Beautiful Therapy Dogs, Inc.* based in Morristown, New Jersey. All therapy dogs must be certified and registered with one of the (over 150) therapy dog organizations nationwide. Rim of the World Comfort Pets are all registered with *The Bright and Beautiful*, which provides liability insurance for all activities under the auspices of therapy dog service. With safety first, it is always necessary to be protected if an unexpected incident occurs.

Ms. Smith is driven to continue to train and certify teams of volunteer service-minded people who want to give back and pay it forward and to bring the life-giving gift of unconditional love and healing from an angel in a fur coat with 4 paws and a wet nose to all who need it.

As she reminds us, "Therapy Dogs Change Lives!" (www.comfortpets.org).

