

# Park dog is teaching life lessons

*Chesapeake Bay retriever Toby is featured in a popular book series and has become a hospital companion*

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*News Staff*

Sherwood Park resident Charmaine Hammond and her dog Toby have been included in the recently published *Chicken Soup for the Soul: What I Learned from the Dog*.

The duo will be at Chapters in the Sherwood Park Mall on Saturday to sign autographs and provide paw prints.

Hammond wrote her short story, "Volunteering from the Heart," reflecting on the impact Toby has made in her life, as well as the lives of others.

"When I got that news (about the story being published in *Chicken Soup*), I was ecstatic. I was so thrilled and it still excites me," Hammond said. "Every day, I look at the book and think, 'Wow, I'm in there.'"

Hammond and her husband, Chris, adopted Toby, a seven-year-old Chesapeake Bay retriever, from the Northern Alberta Society for Animal Protection two years ago.

"He's just an amazing dog," Hammond said. "After he settled in after we had him for about three months, he started to display what we call 'quirky behaviours.'"

Those behaviours and the impacts on Hammond's life from helping Toby is what "Volunteering from the Heart" is about.

It turns out that Toby suffers from separation anxiety.

When the Hammonds were away from home for too long, Toby would pull all of their shoes out of the hallway closet and pile them in front of the front door, pull books off the bookshelf and make a general mess of things.

If the bathroom door wasn't closed when they left, he'd go into the room, lock himself in, and knock everything over and even break the lid covering the toilet's tank.

"We've gone through four toilet tank lids," Hammond laughed.

Eventually, the Hammonds called in an animal behaviouralist for help who said Toby was acting out because he was uncertain of his role in his new family needed a purpose in life.

Shortly thereafter, Toby was trained and began spending time with patients at the Alberta Hospital Edmonton. He has his

own routine and knows what patients need cuddling and what patients need more active visits.

In addition to the visiting with patients, about nine neighbourhood kids regularly stop by the Hammonds' home, asking if Toby can play.

Hammond said Toby has also helped his owners, with her refocusing her life after working 15 years as a professional speaker and facilitator.

"Toby's story, to be really honest with you ... it reminded me about how important having a life purpose was," she said.

Now, Toby's acting out has become less and less, but when he

does, the Hammonds take it as a sign that they need to slow their lives down.

"Every day I learn through this dog about what's important in my life," Hammond said. "I firmly believe that he came to us for a reason."

Hammond's experience with Toby are also leading her to further pursue her interest in writing.

She plans to publish two more books, *Toby's Terms* and *GPS Your Best Life: Taking You From Where You Are To Where You Want To Be*.

A website, [www.tobytales.com](http://www.tobytales.com), is expected to be active by the end of the week, detailing more anecdotes

of Toby's behaviour and providing "pawsitive" weekly messages about enjoying life.

The website will, in the future, allow for others to contribute stories about their pets as well.

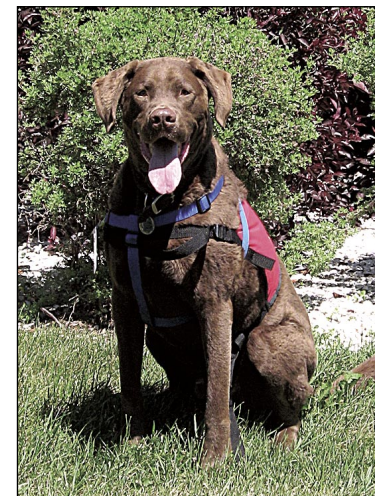
A Toby product line of toys and leashes with inspirational messages is also in the works.

He'll also be a guest of honour at the upcoming canine awareness centre grand opening in St. Albert.

"He'll be Sherwood Park's newest four-legged entrepreneur," Hammond quipped.

"Every day, Toby gives us a story," Hammond said.

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*Photo Supplied*

**Toby gives a "pawsitive" message.**