

# walnut creek

## M A G A Z I N E

## Dynamic Forces - Elena Bicker

By Rob Stankus - Dec 12, 2017



*Elena Bicker*  
*Executive Director, Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation*

Management Development Program. The company's community-minded culture encouraged employee volunteerism and soon Bicker found herself at a fundraiser for animals hosted by baseball legend, Tony LaRussa, who asked her to join his team.

At that time ARF had one employee. She resisted at first, becoming a volunteer and a puppy foster. But after taking a six-month sabbatical from GE to assist ARF with organizational strategy and sustainability, there was no turning back. Bicker joined ARF in 1998 as Director of Marketing and in 2006, became Executive Director.

For Bicker, her role at ARF isn't work. It's not just a career. It's a lifestyle choice that matches business skills with passion. She's encouraged to see pets increasingly elevated in society for their many benefits—companionship, health, and unconditional love—a firm believer that when people are paired with pets, everyone wins.

That's the message Elena Bicker spreads in the community and across the country. ARF's work on a national level stretches coast to coast. Nowhere was this more evident than during the recent natural disasters when ARF disaster response teams mobilized vets, volunteers, vehicles, and a chartered plane to evacuate animals from the path of Florida's Hurricane Irma and the Sonoma wildfires.

But when asked what she's most passionate about, Bicker points to Pets for Vets. Her flagship program takes abandoned dogs off "death row" then trains and assigns them to veterans struggling with PTSD, who often need a psychological boost just to get through the day.

There's no hiding the pride Bicker has for ARF and her team, or the impact they've had on the lives of animals and people. Today, ARF has a staff of 100 who re-homed over 2600 pets last year, and more than 37,000 since its inception. Now that's an accomplishment to bark about.

She got her first dog, Sam, when she was six. Part lab, part poodle, he was a mutt in those days before the labradoodle became a designer dog. Sam provided comfort and consistency to a Marine's daughter who grew up attending eight schools across the country. Always the "new kid," she was painfully shy. Coming home every day after school to a wagging tale and unconditional love provided her first insight into the power pets have to soothe and ease the hurt in life.

As Executive Director of Walnut Creek's Animal Rescue Foundation (ARF), Elena Bicker has outgrown her shyness but not her passion for pets. A California native and St. Mary's College graduate in business administration, Bicker was selected for a prestigious opportunity in GE Capital's