

# PATRIOTPAWS

SERVICE DOGS



## NETWORKING FOR VETERANS

When Patriot PAWS places a service dog with a veteran, it's not the end of our relationship. Our trainers are always available to help with any dog issues that may arise, but we also provide valuable veteran-to-veteran support as well, thanks in large part to our Veteran Coordinator, **Aaron Mixell**, along with retired Veteran Coordinator **Jay Springstead**, a Vietnam combat veteran, and volunteer **Sam Keerikoolparn**, also a veteran.

Aaron, an Army combat veteran, is a peer counselor for Veterans For PAWS (VFP) which meets weekly and is open to all veterans, not just those who have received one of our dogs or are on our waiting list. These meetings are designed to supplement VA services by providing a judgment-free circle of peers who can be called upon for support and understanding at any time, not just at meetings. VFP's successful approach has enabled them to grow into a nationwide network of veterans and veteran resource groups, including 2 radio networks, located in approximately 30 states.

Aaron has talked with veterans of all ages from all branches of the military and says that the predominant sentiment that he hears about veteran-to-veteran support is, "You don't have to explain." Many veterans have difficulty speaking about their experiences to counselors and doctors and find it hard, if not impossible, to explain how those experiences affect their lives now. But another veteran may know and understand firsthand, no explanation necessary.

Having a service dog can't fix every problem. Depression can sometimes be overwhelming. One veteran who had received an in-home working service dog called wanting to give his dog back saying that he wouldn't be around anymore to need one. Aaron

called a veteran in the VFP network who lived nearby to go and stay with him while Aaron drove there himself. "Sometimes you have to put your own life on pause to help other lives on pause," he explained. "Veterans typically don't like to ask for help, but they don't want to fail their dog, either."

Sadly, the working life of a service dog usually falls far short of the life of his veteran, and losing a service dog can be devastating. Aaron, who has service dog **Chief**, likens being without his dog to "feeling naked, like I forgot to put on my pants." Patriot PAWS Founder

Lori Stevens recently received a call from a veteran who had just received the terrible news that his service dog was terminally ill and needed to be put down. Hearing the despair and grief in his voice, Lori and Training Director Bonnie Hoard, a Navy veteran, dropped everything and made the multi-hour drive to be with him so he wouldn't have to go through the ordeal alone.

Many veterans feel that when they left the military, they left a part of themselves behind, which makes transitioning to civilian life even more difficult. VFP strives to find each veteran's skills and strengths to add to the resource network so that he or she can not only be helped but can help others as well when called upon. Bonnie calls it "finding your purpose" and credits Patriot PAWS for filling the void she felt after leaving the Navy.

Aaron stresses that neither Patriot PAWS nor the VFP network ever tries to be a substitute for professional help for the problems that veterans face. Providing service dogs and peer support serves to supplement VA services so that hopefully, no veteran ever has to feel that he or she has nowhere else to turn for the support and understanding that they need.



PASSION LED US HERE



## VETERAN ANTHONY BALISI AND ROSE PETAL

Army SFC **Anthony Balisi** of Texas served for 22 years. He worked in Field Artillery on numerous deployments including Bosnia, Kuwait and 2 tours in Iraq where he was injured in an IED explosion.

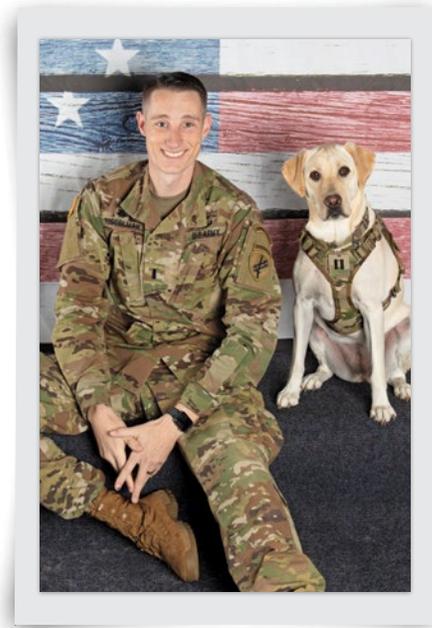
At the October 2018 Graduation ceremony, Anthony received service dog Rose Petal, a female yellow Lab. Anthony credits Rose Petal with not only helping him to be able to go back to school, where he says she makes the other veterans smile and laugh, but to also have a better relationship with his wife and kids. "I want to thank Patriot PAWS for making a tremendous difference in my life."



## VETERAN CARLOS DEJESUS AND SGT. NICK

Army CW2 **Carlos DeJesus** of Texas served for 21 years. He worked in Special Forces on numerous deployments, including Bosnia and 5 tours in Afghanistan, during which he sustained multiple service-related injuries.

Carlos was initially skeptical about what a service dog could do for him, but since he received service dog Sgt. Nick, a male yellow Lab, he says he feels a sense of relief. "I am no longer embarrassed about my condition. I hope Nick and I can advocate for other veterans that there's help out there. Warriors can help heal warriors. I am learning to live peacefully with myself and can't say thank you enough."



## ARMY 1LT SPENCER FUSSELMAN AND CPT BLUE

Army 1LT **Spencer Fusselman** is currently stationed in Texas. He is working on a Master of Divinity degree, with an emphasis on counseling, to become an Army Chaplain. At the October 2018 Graduation ceremony, Spencer received service dog Blue, a female yellow Lab, to not only help him deal with his own service-related issues, but to be a ministry support tool in helping him help other service members in both garrison and tactical environments. As is Army custom, Blue outranks her handler with the rank of Captain.

Spencer says that, "When I'm overwhelmed, Blue will lean on me and remind me that she is there. She's helping me find triggers so I can work through them. In her role in the Army, she has proven herself invaluable. Her presence allows the unit ministry team to build relationships and positively impact many soldiers quickly."

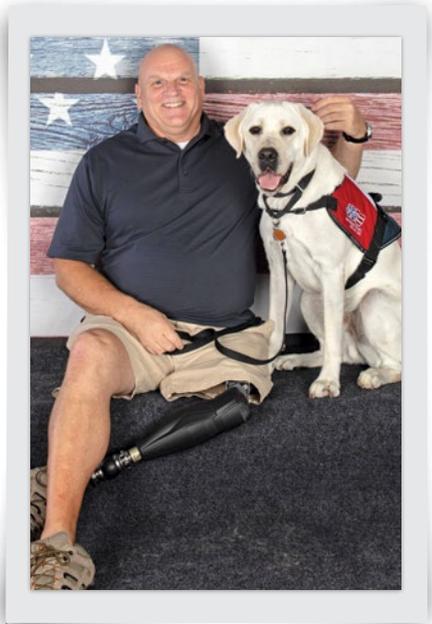
## ELI'S CORNER

From computers to smart phones to smart just about everything else you can think of, technology has crept into virtually every aspect of our lives. And these days, there's an app for almost everything. But as smart as all our devices have become, they still can't train dogs. And there's no app for it, either. It takes real, live dog trainers to take a young puppy and mold him into a service dog with all the love and patience and understanding that only one living creature can bestow upon another. All the technology in the world is no substitute for encouragement and praise and yes, you guessed it, belly rubs! Leo and I feel pretty secure that our jobs are safe from technological takeover because no robo-cat could ever train dogs the way we do. And best of all, we don't require batteries!

Until next time, dear friends.

*Eli*





**VETERAN BRENT JURGERSEN AND CHRIS**

Army SGM **Brent Jurgensen** of Virginia served for 22 years. He was critically wounded on both of his tours in Iraq, receiving a gunshot to the face on the first and losing his left leg on the second after his vehicle was struck with 2 RPGs.

At the October 2018 Graduation ceremony, Brent received service dog Chris, a male yellow Lab, his second Patriot PAWS service dog. His first dog, Houston, served him well but sadly passed away. Brent explains that a relationship with a service dog is “being there for each other, trusting each other, helping each other and navigating this thing called life together. Chris makes a difference in my life every day. I am proud to be part of the PPSD family and look forward to my journey with Chris.”



**VETERAN RACHEL STANKIEWICZ AND STAR**

Army SSG **Rachel Stankiewicz** of Texas served for 8 years, including a tour in Iraq, and was a Chemical Operations Specialist. She has service-related disabilities.

At the October 2018 Graduation ceremony, Rachel received service dog Star, a female yellow Lab. Rachel would like everyone to know that, “Having Star in my life is a blessing in more ways than I could have imagined. She is not only a friend but also the most loyal companion who never wants to leave my side. She comforts me, and I love her for all she does for me. Thank you!”



**VETERAN REBEKKAH THOMAS AND REBA**

Army SGT **Rebekkah Thomas** of Illinois served for 10 years, including a tour in Iraq, and was a Heavy Construction Equipment Operator. She has been diagnosed with service-related disabilities.

At the October 2018 Graduation ceremony, Rebekkah received service dog Reba, a female yellow Lab. Rebekkah credits Reba with helping her in ways that enable her to get out of the house more. “I’ve managed to take a trip to Indianapolis that I never would have done without her. I also sleep better with her. Reba has done a lot.”

**NEW PUPPIES IN TRAINING!**



**LETTER FROM LORI**

When I received word that Sgt. Nick had passed away, I felt sad as with the loss of any friend. But being a WWII veteran and a member of “The Greatest Generation”, Sgt. Nick was more than just a friend, he was a national treasure. Our nation’s WWII veterans are passing away at the rate of over 300 per day, and sadly, many of their incredible service stories are being lost with them. We had the great honor and privilege to share Sgt. Nick’s story with all of you in our newsletter and to chronicle his fundraising efforts on our behalf in his quest to fund a service dog for a fellow veteran. His life mantra was “Never Give Up”, words of wisdom we would all do well to live by because no one is ever too old to be valuable in some way or to touch the lives of others. A life well lived, when over, leaves those left behind smiling through their tears. Sgt. Nick, I will always smile when I think of you.

## FROM THE KENNELS

Hi! My name is **Pearl**, and I'm in training to become a Patriot PAWS service dog! My days here at Patriot PAWS are spent learning all the ways I can help my future veteran. Here's what an average day in the life of a Patriot PAWS service dog in training is like.

Every morning, our awesome Kennel Staff cleans my kennel from top to bottom. They are always making sure my friends and I have a nice place to live. After that, my trainers feed me my yummy Purina Pro Plan breakfast, and then we go straight to work!

All throughout the day, my trainers and I practice the cues I already know, but they teach me new things, too. We have so much fun together! I really love them because they always tell me what a smart girl I am and give me delicious treats.

In between my training sessions, wonderful volunteers play outside with me and brush my coat. And before heading back to training, I even take a nap!

Then before I know it, the day is coming to an end. Last thing, my friends and I get tucked in by Kennel Staff so we can all dream about the veterans we will someday be helping. Sweet dreams, everybody!



**Didn't get to read Sgt. Nick's service story in our Summer 2016 issue?** Every past Patriot PAWS newsletter is archived on our website. Just go to [www.patriotpaws.org](http://www.patriotpaws.org) and click on *News/Newsletters* to read what you've missed and see how we've grown!

## ENGRAVED BRICKS FUNDRAISER UPDATE:

Construction of our new veterans' house, courtesy of the Dallas Builders Association, is now complete – **thank you, DBA!** And thanks to all who collectively ordered the total 187 bricks and 13 benches that will grace our new garden area, Patriot Garden. We are currently not accepting new orders until after installation, set to begin in March, but there will be new opportunities in the future to order additional personalized, engraved bricks and benches, so stay tuned for details.

## GONE, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Our dear friend, 101-year-old **WWII Army veteran Sgt. Norval "Nick" Nichols**, passed away on Christmas Day 2018. His remarkable service story was featured on the cover of our Summer 2016 newsletter. Sgt. Nick had been fundraising for Patriot PAWS every birthday since his 99th by asking for donations in lieu of gifts for himself. He also set up a GoFundMe page for our benefit. At his 100th birthday party, we surprised Sgt. Nick with the news that a puppy in training to become a service dog had been named in his honor. Puppy Sgt. Nick was introduced to his veteran shortly before Sgt. Nick's death, something Cheryl Nichols, Sgt. Nick's daughter, said she will cherish forever. "Who knew



that Puppy Sgt. Nick would find his veteran, Carlos, just in the 'nick' of time to share the news with Sgt. Nick before he died? I'm eternally grateful for everyone at Patriot PAWS who adopted my dad and gave him loving friendship and purpose in his last few years." Memorial donations to Patriot PAWS may be made at [www.gofundme.com/sgtnick100](http://www.gofundme.com/sgtnick100) or by designating "Sgt. Nick" on any other form of donation. Rest in peace, Sgt. Nick.

## IN MEMORIAM

The Patriot PAWS Family's hearts go out to Veteran **Brian Field** for the loss of his service dog, **Justice**, who was the 2011 winner of The Texas Veterinary Medical Foundation's Companion Texas Animal Hall of Fame Award.

*Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal.*  
— Author Unknown

• 972-772-3282 •

**Consider today what you can do to help us help them...**



*"The atmosphere here is unreal and reinforces the fact of how great it is to be an American veteran! What is really amazing is how the commitment of Patriot PAWS never ends. They are here forever for each veteran who receives one of their great animals..."* — Arlie Matthews, 2016 Graduate

### PLEASE DONATE TODAY

- We accept all major credit cards on our website at [www.patriotpaws.org](http://www.patriotpaws.org)
- Cash, checks and money orders by mail or in person. **Address:**  
**254 Ranch Trail**  
**Rockwall, TX 75082**

### ALSO CONSIDER:

- Setting up a recurring donation
- Honoring or memorializing someone
- Matching your employee's donation
- Pledging for a 3-year period
- Becoming a PAWS ambassador

- Conducting a fundraiser
- Volunteering or becoming a puppy raiser
- If you are a Federal employee, you may make donations using our CFC# 35710
- Every time you shop at [www.smile.amazon.com](http://www.smile.amazon.com), Amazon will donate .5% of the purchase price to Patriot PAWS at no cost to you.