



Mission Statement: Dogs For Life, Inc. is a non-profit organization devoted to improving the quality of life for veterans and other individuals in need through training hearing and service dogs, providing therapy dogs for first responders and school resource programs, and owning an off-leash dog park.

News

PRINTS

Vol. 25 / Issue 2 / Fall 2024



Rocket Lands at DFL

The newest DFL service puppy in training is a happy-go-lucky black Labrador Retriever named Rocket.

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NEWSPRINTS

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What's New?



The DFL 2024 Patriots For Puppies event

Dogs For Life's signature fundraiser, Patriots For Puppies, will be combined with the DFL Annual Awards and Graduation Ceremony for 2025!

The new event, Dogs For Life Patriots Awards and Graduation Ceremony, will be held on April 26. See page 19 for more details.

Correction - In the Spring issue, we misstated Jonathan Hardie's title. Mr. Hardie is Executive General Manager of Dyer Chevrolet, Subaru, and Mazda. We also mis-identified volunteers in a photo from the DFL Graduation and Awards Ceremony. Photos with corrected captions appear below. We deeply regret these errors.



Dyer Sales Manager Frank Felkey, Shelly Ferger, DFL Volunteer Cheryl Marshall (USAF Ret.), and Dyer Executive General Manager Jonathan Hardie.



Fundraising Volunteers of the Year – Maureen Turner, Linda Barberi, Laura Larimore, and Linda Reeve.

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Dogs For Life, 1230 16th Ave, Vero Beach, Florida 32960 • (772) 567-8969 • www.dogsforlifefvb.org



Eddie Boatwright and service dog Rosie the Riveter.

From *the* President

Many of you have received our survey regarding “Investing in Dogs For Life’s Journey.” Your responses will help the DFL Board determine the viability of short- and long-term growth options for our organization based on the commitment of our funding sources. The Board has identified a vital need to increase staff, and our goal is to secure funding for a full-time Executive Director and Finance Manager.

Recognizing the lack of trained service dogs for veterans, the DFL Board unanimously approved DFL’s key role in the Puppies Assisting Wounded Service Members (PAWS) Pilot Program in partnership with the West Palm Beach VA. However, the PAWS Act, which mandated creation of the PAWS Program, provided no funding. This means DFL must rely on its own funding sources to sustain and grow the PAWS Program.

Whether your connection with DFL is longstanding, recent, or yet to be made, my hope is that you will see yourself “Investing in DFL’s Journey.”

The Board believes hiring an Executive Director and Finance Manager is an essential step in being able to sustain and grow not just the PAWS Program, but all of DFL’s life-saving programs. Supporting and expanding DFL’s programs requires all of us to have a shared vision that recognizes the value of supporting our veteran population – thus, the need for your feedback in our survey.

In the coming months, as we compile survey results, we will be meeting with stakeholders to listen, learn, and strategize. Relationships with our donors are a top priority for the Board. If you have any recommendations or comments for us, do not hesitate to reach out to us at office@dogsforlifevb.org or call 772-567-8969. Whether your connection with DFL is longstanding, recent, or yet to be made, my hope is that you will see yourself “Investing in DFL’s Journey.”

From *the* Founder & CEO

As a Vero Beach native, I am grateful to the people of this community that have supported my vision over the years - from teaching people to train their companion dogs, to organizing Indian River County’s first off-leash dog park, to now leading an Assistance Dogs International-Accredited service dog organization.

Community support gave Dogs For Life the opportunity to be part of the Service Dogs for Veterans movement. Today, DFL is a leader in the service dog industry in Florida, particularly in training people with disabilities to train their own dogs. Since the start of the Puppies Assisting Wounded Service Members (PAWS) Pilot Program, we have trained close to fifty veterans to train their own dogs. The success has been beyond our expectations, and we are now ready to take the journey to surrounding counties.

We are committed to educating veterans not only in our immediate area but also in Southeast Florida about the rights of persons with diagnosed disabilities to train their own service dogs under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Doing so not only empowers veterans to make changes in their own lives, but also to help change the lives of their fellow veterans.

Each completed cohort of the PAWS Program breathes new excitement into our organization. The DFL veteran volunteers are inspired to do more, not only to help their brothers and sisters responsibly train their own service dogs, but also to provide camaraderie and join with them in a shared purpose. I see immense potential in our community. With Florida’s veteran population surging, we must continue to do whatever we can to reduce the suffering of our nation’s heroes. I am ready for Dogs For Life’s role in the work and know that we can fundamentally change the lives of even more people with disabilities in the future.



Shelly Ferger and service dog puppy.

*Wes Samons, Executive Director
The Mental Health Collaborative of Indian River County*

PTSD and Suicide Prevention in Honor of Kathi G. Schumann

The Suicide Prevention/Awareness Symposium was held at Dog's for Life on August 22nd in honor of Mrs. Kathi G. Schumann's birthday and her commitment to Veteran's affairs. As the facilitator,



it was my role to introduce our panel of therapists who presented their own personal experiences with trauma and suicide prevention, and also shared clinical thoughts and suggestions on how we can achieve the

ultimate goal of "Zero Suicides A Day."

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition triggered by experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Combat veterans, first responders, survivors of accidents, and victims of abuse often carry invisible scars that linger long after the immediate danger has passed. The mental and emotional burden can feel relentless. Flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, and emotional numbness become daily companions.

But it's not just the trauma itself that poses a threat — a feeling of isolation and hopelessness often accompanies it. Unfortunately, this combination can sometimes lead individuals to consider suicide as the only way to escape the unbearable pain.

Research shows that individuals with PTSD are at a significantly higher risk of suicide. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, veterans diagnosed with PTSD are twice as likely to die by suicide compared to their peers.

Mrs. Schumann has raised awareness about these dangers, bringing attention to the importance of early intervention, community support, and accessible mental health care. Her message is

clear: while PTSD is a serious condition, it is also treatable, and help is available.

One of Mrs. Schumann's most impactful contributions has been her work to destigmatize conversations around mental health. For far too long, mental health struggles have been hidden, swept under the rug by a culture that often equates vulnerability with weakness. Mrs. Schumann's advocacy encourages open dialogue about the challenges people with PTSD face. She reminds us that seeking help is a sign of strength, not failure. It's important to remember that talking about suicide doesn't make it more likely to happen. In fact, addressing these feelings openly can be the first step toward healing.

While PTSD and the risk of suicide are grave realities, we are reminded that there is hope.

Therapies such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), and trauma-focused therapy have been proven effective in helping individuals. In addition, support systems — from friends and family to mental health professionals — play a crucial role in the healing process.

As Executive Director of The Mental Health Collaborative I am proud of the role we play in the community to link our residents to the services that will improve their mental health and overall quality of life. If you or anyone you know needs help, don't hesitate to contact us at 772-217-3663, or visit www.mhcollaborative.org.



DFL board member Kathi G. Schumann has been an advocate for mental health and suicide prevention for many years.

*Michelle Dale, President
American Gold Star Mothers of Indian River County*

6th Annual Walk-A-Thon Brings Awareness to Heartbreaking Statistic

The number of military/veteran suicides has risen to 44 per day, more than double the rate from just a few years ago. This cannot continue!

To bring awareness to the tragic prevalence of military/veteran suicide, American Gold Star Mothers of Indian River County, Inc. has organized a Walk-A-Thon each year since 2019. Our 6th Annual Walk-A-Thon for Military/Veteran Suicide Awareness and Veteran Resource Expo will take place on Sunday, November 3rd, at Riverside Park in Vero Beach. Please visit ircgoldstarmoms.org to register for the walk or to become a sponsor or vendor.

Our goal is to ensure that those struggling with the “battle within” have access to the help they need without any stigma attached. Proceeds from our annual event provide financial resources to critically needed recovery and support programs for Indian River County’s veterans and active-duty military. These important programs include the weekly PTSD support groups held at Dogs For Life and Mental Health Association of IRC; the weekly curriculum-based co-ed and female-only groups at IRSC; and our newest group, a monthly PTSD spousal support group, which helps spouses and families better cope with the struggles of their loved ones.

With your support, our programs are saving the lives of Indian River County vets. Every so often I hear from group members who are grateful that the help they receive has allowed them to move



forward. Testimonials like this warm my heart, and I pray for the continued success of our recovery and support programs.

The mission of our American Gold Star Mothers is finding strength in the fellowship of other Gold Star Mothers who strive to keep the memory of our sons and daughters alive by working to help veterans, those currently serving in

the military, their families and our communities. We serve in community activities to promote patriotism and support veterans. As President of American Gold Star Mothers of IRC, I am proud to help us achieve this mission locally.

In addition to hosting the Walk-A-Thon, American Gold Star Mothers of IRC are engaged in a number of other community events. In May we helped to honor our WW II veterans at the Vero Beach Air Show, and later that month we organized Memorial Day festivities to honor our heroes. In June we celebrated the 100th birthday of another one of our WW II vets, complete with a party and drive-by. It is our pleasure to honor the heroes of all ages that have sacrificed so much for our country.

We hope to see you at this year’s Walk-A-Thon for Military/Veteran Suicide Awareness. Whether you join us as a walker, sponsor, or vendor, we thank you for believing in our cause!



*Jade Garneau-Fournier, Ph.D., PAWS Psychologist
Center for Development and Civic Engagement, West Palm Beach VA Healthcare System*

Fur-tastic Moments



The Puppies Assisting Wounded Service Members (PAWS) Pilot Program has already reached its halfway point! PAWS has entered its third year and continues to grow and evolve to better cater to the needs and preferences of local South Florida veterans. Over 40 veterans have completed the program. The ninth cohort is almost underway, and a tenth cohort is set to begin in January of 2025. As a result of the program, many participants now experience less isolation, find a sense of purpose, and feel more connected to their own dogs. The VA is incredibly grateful for the volunteers from Dogs for Life who have enriched PAWS by generously sharing their stories and allowing participants to handle their service dogs.

In recognition of National Service Dog Month, the Annual Service Dog Awareness Event was held at the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center on Thursday, September 26, 2024. This event provided an opportunity for the community to connect with veterans and various local service dog organizations, including DFL, and to learn about the services available to current and prospective service dog owners. Most importantly, it was a time to celebrate and honor the extraordinary work service dogs do to improve the lives of so many veterans.



PAWS Program Graduates from Cohort 7 (above) and Cohort 8 (below) pose with DFL representatives.



DFL took part in this community event in honor of National Service Dog Month.

PAWS Program: A Student's Perspective

By David Glass, USAF

I was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) more than a decade ago. I slowly withdrew from social situations and became more reclusive.

As a veteran, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provided me with the therapy and treatment to manage my PTSD, but it takes a lot of work. In 2023, I received an email from the VA with information about a five-year pilot program for veterans with PTSD called Puppies Assisting Wounded Service Members (PAWS). The goal of PAWS is to provide dog training to veterans with PTSD, so they can help train service dogs for other veterans.

The VA works in conjunction with Dogs For Life, one of just five Assistance Dog International (ADI) accredited organizations in Florida. Lucky for me, I live in the same city as DFL! I applied for and was accepted to the program in July 2024.

PAWS has given me new skills to hone, camaraderie with fellow veterans and dog trainers, and the confidence to try to be more social. The eight-week course offers practical experience such as preparing dogs for the CGC Good Citizen test. I learned how to read a dog's behavior and expressions to better understand if they are content, stressed, submissive, playful, defensive, aggressive, or just being a dog.

It is heartbreaking how many disabled veterans need service dogs. The waiting list is up to five years, but PAWS and DFL help fill this void.

One of the benefits of PAWS for me was being able to interact with other veterans with PTSD.

I was very apprehensive to take part, but my fears were put to rest after meeting my cohort and some of the veteran alumni. With each successive class I opened up and became more relaxed. Our shared successes with the dogs, exercises, and DFL staff led to companionship and unity of purpose.

The fellowship I felt during the PAWS sessions gave me the confidence and hope to try to go out more with my family and interact with others.

Although a small group, my PAWS cohort was a positive step towards increasing my social interaction. It reduced my anxiety because I was focused more on shaping the dogs' behavior than my own internal struggles while in public. If I can build on this confidence, I will improve both my and my family's quality of life.

PAWS is a powerful program. It is a win-win for two specific groups of disabled veterans: those with PTSD and those in need of a service dog. For me, the project provided the new skill of dog training, giving me an increased sense of purpose.

After I graduate, I plan on volunteering at DFL to improve this skill and help other veterans.

PAWS has increased my sense of belonging and camaraderie with fellow disabled veterans. The program opened a door for me to try and enjoy social situations instead of dreading them. For all of this, I thank the staff of PAWS and DFL. I sincerely appreciate each of the people I met for their acceptance, guidance, and inclusion.



ADI International Conference



conduct business regarding educating the public about assistance dogs, advocating for the legal rights of people with disabilities partnered with assistance dogs, setting standards for the industry, and establishing guidelines and ethics for the training of assistance dogs.

The ADI 2025 International Conference, to be held in Orlando on March 2-5, 2025,

Assistance Dogs International (ADI), a worldwide coalition of not-for-profit organizations that train and place assistance dogs, was founded in 1986 and has become the leading authority in the assistance dog industry.

ADI members meet regularly to share ideas and

will further ADI's mission to foster a collaborative global community dedicated to the highest standards of excellence for the assistance dog industry. As an ADI-accredited organization and member of ADI, Dogs For Life is looking forward to attending the conference and networking with other ADI members.

Jeep Club "Goes Topless" for DFL



(L to R) Don (USA Ret.) and Meg Peterson with service pups in training, Marisel Munoz Febo (USAF) with Honcho, Kimberlee Mitala with Chocolate, Cheryl Marshall (USAF Ret.) with Dallas, Phil Tettleton with Sully, Tim Barnes with Gypsy and Jim Hyde (USN) with Otis.

This year the Treasure Coast Jeep Club again selected Dogs For Life to receive proceeds from the Club's annual "Go Topless" fundraising event. On May 21, over one hundred Jeeps paraded from Vatland Jeep to Sebastian Inlet, where DFL service

dog teams and volunteers gathered to cheer them on. The event raised more than \$3,000 for DFL, bringing the Club's total donations in recent years to over \$10,000! We are very grateful for the Treasure Coast Jeep Club's support.

Rocket Has Landed!

Dogs For Life's newest service pup in training arrived in Vero Beach in August, when he was just over ten weeks old. Named "Rocket," he comes to us from Patriot PAWS Service Dogs in Rockwall, Texas.

Patriot PAWS' mission is similar to DFL's in that it trains and provides service dogs at no cost to disabled American veterans and others with mobile disabilities. Both are members of the Assistance Dogs International (ADI)'s breeding co-operative, which facilitates sharing of puppies among co-op members with the



Rocket with Jill McCullough, Puppies in Flight volunteer.

goal of improving the quality of all assistance dogs.

American Airlines employee Jill McCullough volunteered to transport Rocket from Texas to Florida via Puppies in Flight (PIF), ADI's partnership program with American Airlines (AA). Jill previously worked for AA as a flight attendant and instructor and learned about PIF years ago. The pandemic and a busy schedule kept her from transporting puppies until she stopped flying and moved into an office job with AA in December 2023. Rocket was her first PIF transport!

"This was my first official transport, and he was such a sweet boy. He gave lots of kisses and slept most of the flight," said Jill. "He got a lot of attention at both airports and also on the plane, and he seemed to eat it up. He's going to be a great service dog!"

DFL volunteers Don and Meg Peterson met Jill's flight in Fort Lauderdale and took Rocket home. As Rocket's initial "puppy raisers," the Petersons will help Rocket learn good behavior and provide him with lots of loving care. Eventually Rocket will begin training classes at DFL, and when he is ten to eighteen months of age, he will be partnered with a DFL client.

DFL thanks all of you who support our puppy raising and other service dog programs. We are especially grateful to Jill McCullough and the folks at Patriot PAWS for ensuring Rocket's safe landing at DFL.

Please visit the educational programs tab on DFL's website to learn more about being a puppy raiser and be sure to stop by DFL to meet Rocket.



Rocket, donated by Patriot PAWS Service Dogs, on the day of his arrival.

*Robyn Candarini, Indian River County Sheriff's Office
Public Safety Dispatch Unit Director, STAR Team Leader/Therapy K9 Handler*

Spirit Shines on the "STAR" Team

What better feeling is there than the love and comfort of a dog? Spirit is the epitome of that love and comfort and is happy to wag his entire backside at the mere thought that someone is going to reach down and pet him.

Spirit has been a member of the IRC SO for almost a year now and has shined in his role as a therapy K9. Spirit's average workday consists of greeting Sheriff's Office employees, getting to visit with both sworn and professional staff, and providing kisses to all who request them. His training as a therapy K9 also allows him to bring comfort to other public safety agencies and community members.

Spirit's role as a member of the Sheriff's Traumatic Advocate Response ("STAR") team has taken him to other counties in the State to assist law enforcement agencies with various support needs. We recently spent four days in the Florida panhandle after a crisis situation, and Spirit successfully lifted spirits and provided a sense of comfort to those who needed him most. Spirit also has been called out on numerous occasions to help our own community members experiencing traumatic situations and, in each case, made new friends who continue to request his visits.

As his handler, I am grateful that I get to witness "the light," as I like to call it. We can visit someone who initially appears to be anxious or stressed, and after a short time being around a therapy K9 you actually can see the change in the person's face and witness their breathing becoming more normal. Spirit's comforting demeanor and overall personality make him perfect for his job!



Robyn and Spirit, 2024 DFL Graduates.

... and Lua is a Star, too!



Michele and Lua, 2023 DFL Graduates.

As part of DFL's therapy dog program, Michele Laibe and Lua visit the Vero Beach Police Department to soothe anxiety and raise spirits of officers and employees in the department. DFL is very grateful for teams like Michelle and Lua who generously volunteer their time to bring comfort to local law enforcement and first responders. Michelle proudly reports that "Lua performed her civic duties [recently] giving wags, cuddles, and love to Vero's finest. She visited with everyone including detectives, traffic patrol, code enforcement and dispatch. She is an amazing girl. Everybody loves her so much!"



Lua spreads cheer at the VBPD. (L to R) Deputy Chief Matthew Monaco, Lt. Phil Huddy and Chief David Currey.

Nancy E. Kicherer, DVM

There's More than Gators in Florida Waters!

Service dogs are some of the most well cared for creatures alive, but I bet you don't know about Leptospirosis in our Florida waters and soil!

Leptospirosis bacteria kill dogs daily here in Florida and throughout the world, simply due to the lack of a current vaccination against this disease.

Ok, so let's say you know your dog is vaccinated for "Lepto" as we call it, but is his or her vaccination current? This vaccine "runs out," so if your service dog is behind on this vaccine then there is NO protection.

Most people don't care to know details regarding their dog's vaccines, but the Rabies and Lepto vaccines should be a different story. Leptospirosis can kill your dog, and also is contagious to you and your family.



Dr. Nancy Kicherer and her service dog, Stryker.

Vaccination is protective 99% of the time. Exposure to this deadly disease can occur daily, especially in warm, moist climates like Florida. The bacteria can live in water, soil, and bodily fluids, especially urine. Leptospirosis is transmitted mostly by rats, raccoons, mice, possums, and skunks, and contact with ponds, streams, backyards, and public parks are common ways this disease is contracted.

Leptospirosis can cause a variety of symptoms ranging from fever, vomiting and diarrhea, to bloody urine. The disease attacks the liver and kidneys and is fatal more than 25% of the time. It also is costly to manage medically. With this knowledge, I hope you will keep track of your dog's Lepto vaccine due dates, and be aware that along with heartworm prevention, vaccination is truly lifesaving for your service dog.



Get a New "Leash" on Life as a Puppy Raiser!



DFL urgently needs volunteers willing to be puppy raisers. If your lifestyle doesn't allow you to care for a dog full-time, puppy raising may be right for you! Can you provide a loving home? Would you be willing to attend weekly training classes with your puppy?

DFL makes it easy to get your puppy fix! DFL supplies food, equipment, toys, and veterinary care; you supply the love. Contact Shelly Ferger, DFL CEO, at office@dogsforlifevb.org for more information.

DFL Honors Roxanna Hinzman



Roxanna Hinzman (front row, center) poses with DFL clients, friends and many of the DFL service pups she fostered.

Dogs For Life staff, volunteers, service dog teams, friends, and family gathered to thank long-time volunteer Roxanna Hinzman at a luncheon in her honor on April 17. Roxanna, who has been a DFL puppy raiser since 2021, has fostered more than a dozen puppies during her time with DFL. Many of the puppies, now grown and part of DFL service dog teams, attended the lunch with their partners.

Roxanna retired from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in September of 2022. Before her job brought her to Vero Beach, she raised four service pups for Canine Companions for Independence. Roxanna and her sister, Dana, are moving to the Gulf Coast of Florida to be near family. While she will no longer be a regular part of our puppy raising program, Roxanna's new home is not far from Southeastern Guide Dogs' campus near Tampa. The next time DFL receives a donated pup from Southeastern Guide Dogs we'll have reason to swing by Roxanna's and say hello.

Best of luck in your new home, Roxanna! Your love for the puppies, experience in fostering, compassionate and consistent training style, and mentorship to the other puppy raisers will be sorely missed at DFL.

Wounded Waters Makes a Splash



(L to R) Laurie Turner (USMC) and Marley, Kymberlee Mitala and Chocolate, Phil Tettleton and Sully, Jim Hyde (USN) and Otis and Tim Barnes and Gypsy.

Wounded Waters, a non-profit organization that focuses on helping veterans, active-duty military, and first responders cope with traumatic events through fishing, held its 2nd Annual Offshore War Fishing Tournament on May 25. DFL service dog teams and volunteers were onhand at Causeway Cove Marina in Fort Pierce to honor our heroes and enjoy the festivities.

DFL Forms Grant Committee

Dogs For Life recently created a Grant Committee. This new committee, together with our individual and corporate approaches to fundraising, makes up the three legs of DFL's "fund development stool."

The committee consists of a team of dynamic volunteers that meets weekly at DFL. Its members assume the daunting task of searching and applying for grant opportunities.

Endless work is involved in pursuing foundation grants. Each foundation must be screened for compatibility with DFL's programs and priorities, such as service dogs, veterans, first responders, PTSD, disabilities, and pet-assisted therapy. The foundation application and approval process also considers, among other things, geographical area served and audited financials.

Through August 2024, the committee sent out sixty-three letters of inquiry and had four applications pending. Recent successes include grant awards from Head, Heart and Hands of Indian River Club, Indian River Community Foundation, and the Leslie L. Alexander Foundation.

Without DFL's dedicated volunteers, we would not have received these grants, nor could we run the day-to-day operations at the center, such as answering the telephone and supporting our various programs and projects. We look forward to showing our appreciation again during DFL's Annual Volunteer Appreciation event. We couldn't do it without YOU!



DFL Grant Committee: (L to R) Grant Writer Lynne Levin; Research Assistant Linda Reeve; Grant Manager Laura Larimore.

Veteran's Golf Tournament



Representatives from DFL and Vietnam and All Veterans of Indian River County express their appreciation for the generous anonymous donation on behalf of DFL.

The Mary Snyder Memorial Golf Tournament took place on Saturday, June 15, at Sandridge Golf Club. The event was hosted by Vietnam and All Veterans of Indian River County, whose mission is to assist veterans who have fought for our freedoms. An anonymous donor sponsored the charity golf tournament on behalf of Dogs For Life. Proceeds of the tournament benefited veterans in Indian River County.



My Life with Rosie

By Todd Defren

For much of their 40+ years of marriage, Steve and Ronnie Defren had worked together to build a family and to run their small optical supply wholesale company. They were both Brooklyn, NY natives but after Steve's Vietnam era stint in the Army ended, they had settled as newlyweds in a picture-perfect wooded suburb in Connecticut. They raised two great kids. Steve spent many years as a civic leader in the community, volunteering for posts in town government and with the Jaycees. Did your hometown host a 4th of July fireworks display? A guy like Steve organized it - the guy behind the scenes, getting stuff done, with a ready joke at hand and no expectations for thanks or glory.

Life wasn't easy, because it never is, but overall it was a great and successful run. Eventually the kids moved on and Steve's infamous and much-loved "Countdown to Retirement" clock started ticking with real urgency. Florida beckoned! No more snow! He and Ronnie "spec'd" out their dream house in New Smyrna Beach. They excitedly showed off their house plans; made their deposits; started packing up the one house they'd lived in for 40 years; and began winding down the business.

Everything was going according to plan, until Ronnie's breast cancer - beaten back 2x already over the years - came roaring back and stole her away at just 62 years old. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

Steve lived alone in their dream house for a short while, but the painful memories pushed him to make a new life for himself. He eventually found himself in Vero Beach, and as the grief began to pass and he settled in, a new challenge arose: now what?

He'd been a successful salesman in his career, a celebrated civic leader, a man in the arena: he needed

people. He needed community. He needed to do something. He found his new calling helping his fellow Indian River County veterans.

For the past few years, Steve has volunteered at the Victory Center Military Store at the Indian River Mall. The vet store sells non-political apparel, flags, and assorted military tchotchkes to support local veteran causes. Steve is a shift manager and maintains inventory at the store. He loves meeting with the public - especially in support of veterans. "I like to feel useful at all times; I've got to keep moving," he says.

Ironically it was during one of his stints at the Victory Center Military Store that he met Shelly Ferger, founder of Dogs For Life.

"I was volunteering at the vet center one day, around the holidays, and I waited on this woman who was buying up a storm! So, we get to talking and she mentions she runs a dog training center here in town. And I immediately piped up, 'Oh, I like dogs, do you need volunteers?'"

From such tiny interactions, great second acts are born. He loved extending his volunteer work for his fellow veterans through yet another organization. Steve started volunteering at DFL and "it wasn't long



Dogs For Life Awards presented to Steve Defren

Military Veteran Volunteer of the Year - 2018

Military Veteran Volunteer of the Year - 2019

Foster Dog Family Award - 2020

Puppy Sponsor of the Year - 2024

Then and Now

before Shelly realized I'd do just about anything. I just liked being around people, doing any kind of work for a good cause. It's a great reason to get out of the house. I'd do anything asked of me without complaint."

This is the point where you should start the familiar refrain in your head about how important the "behind-the-scenes folks" are to advancing the mission. Since Steve didn't much care for his occasional gig at the DFL greeter's desk, his first and most enduring job was to help DFL convert several years' worth of paper files to the newly-implemented electronic system. Sounds fancy, right? You know what that job actually entails? Standing in front of a scanner in a back room, with a waist-high stack of manila folders stuffed with old papers ... every time he volunteered ... for over 18 months. Steve never complained. He was happy to be part of the solution! "But yeah, it was pretty boring," he jokes.

After a few years volunteering at DFL, having completed the epic scanning project, the day came when Shelly felt the need to pull Steve aside. It wasn't to praise his work; she'd been nominating Steve for "volunteer of the day/week/month/etc." for a while now. No, she wanted to suggest, as a friend and expert, that he consider a service dog of his own.



Steve, Rosie and trainer Marcia Adache.



In his late 70's now, Steve's hearing has been declining for a while. He didn't have much luck with hearing aids, "and wasn't much interested in what most people had to say, anyway." But with Shelly and his family's urging, he began training and falling in love with a black English labrador named Rosie.

Rosie is the heart and soul of Steve's world now. Not only is she a placid and ever-present companion, she's an integral part of his everyday routines. When his cell phone or doorbell rings, Rosie knows to run up to Steve and sit between his legs to notify him. When he's greeted by a stranger, she lets him know to perk up and pay attention.

As a dog bred to help American veterans, Rosie also has had PTSD training in her curriculum. While Steve luckily never saw combat during his Army tour, there are many similarities between the symptom complexes of PTSD and long-term grief. So, Rosie is really on double-duty, alerting not only to the sounds of everyday life but also to the inner rumblings of sadness in her master.

"I can't imagine life without her now," Steve says. He's very grateful to Shelly for insisting on the pairing. "I really fought it at first. I was here to help and train. I never expected to be a client; I didn't want to become a client!

"But Rosie has been a tremendous help. I have less anxiety in my life, because I know I have a partner to get me through the day. I don't miss calls. I don't miss the UPS deliveries. And best of all I have a friend by my side at all times. I just love this dog. Rosie and DFL have given a new meaning to my life."

Service Dog Re-Certifications

DFL annually re-certifies every service dog team. As part of the ADI Accreditation, owner and service dog must be performing their required public obedience and task work to maintain a certification status.



Marisel Munoz Febo (USAF) and Honcho



Phil Tettleton and Sully with Michele Laibe and Lua



Mark Poziomek and Ranger



Judy Schmidt (USAF) and Bentley



Christopher Adams (USN) and Dozer



Jim Hyde (USN) and Otis with Wanda Haaland and Lola



Kris Hasenauer (USA) and Jasper



Barbara McCoy (USAF) and Mercedes with Sarah Lang and Bradley



Sally Bricker and Nick



Steve Defren (USA) and Rosie



Andy Beebe (USAF) and Truffle



Earl Tindol (USAR) and Arrow

Re-Certifications

Class of 2015

Wanda Haaland and Lola

Class of 2017

Mark Poziomek and Ranger

Class of 2018

Richie Keller (USMC) and Gigi
Judith Ricard and Fitz
Judy Schmidt (USAF) and Bentley

Class of 2019

Sue Bergmann and Spencer
Michael Bores (USA) and Bandit
Kelly Colmey and Joey
Barbara Gormas and Lola
Bill Moruzzi (USA) and Remington

Class of 2020

Jessica Jacobs and Honey
Tammie Mandeville and Poppy
Elizabeth McGoldrick and Oliver
Kimberley Mann (USN) and Elvis
Earl Tindol (USAR) and Arrow
Claude Vitali (USMC) and Beebe

Class of 2021

Kris Hasenauer (USA) and Jasper
Dani Ley and Ollie
Sean Timberlake (USA) and Judy

Class of 2022

Christopher Adams (USN) and Dozer
Andy Beebe (USAF) and Truffle
Marisel Munoz Febo (USAF) and Honcho
Julie Ann Rollins and Dottie
Beth Stryker and Grady
Phil Tettleton and Sully
Maureen Turner and Angus

Class of 2023

Tim Barnes and Gypsy
Mark Birtel and Chip
Steve Defren (USA) and Rosie
Jim Hyde (USN) and Otis
Dr. Nancy Kicherer and Stryker
Michele Laibe and Lua
Sarah Lang and Bradley
Barbara McCoy (USAF) and Mercedes
Howard Teich (USA) and Tucker
Gary Wilson (USA) and Swift
Ingrid Hernandez (USA) and Chance
Sally Bricker and Nick
Andy Watson and Gracie

Class of 2024

Robyn Candarini and Spirit
Guillermo Contreras and Whiskey
Kisha Ford Torres and Kolumbo
Joan Freeman and Minnie
Ron Garrison and Buddy
Kymberlee Mitala and Chocolate
Laurie Turner and Marley

Sponsorship

USA Warrior Stories



USA Warrior Stories recently featured Dogs For Life clients Kimberley Mann and her service dog Elvis, (pictured at left) and Sean Timberlake and his service dog Judy. USA Warrior Stories is an organization that honors U.S. military veterans by recording, archiving, and sharing their stories and experiences. They aim to help

veterans make a connection with one another and help us all better understand their sacrifices for our freedom.

You can watch Kimberley's and Sean's stories, and even see an interview with DFL Founder and CEO Shelly Ferger, at <https://usawarriorstories.org>. We've also posted these videos on the home page of DFL's website at www.dogsforlifevb.org.

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 9TH

Dogs For Life
Training Assistance Dogs
For Veterans

VETERAN'S BENEFIT BRUNCH

at Creperie



\$10 PER PERSON DONATION ENTERS YOU INTO OUR RAFFLE OF FUN PRIZES

*BREAKFAST NOT INCLUDED WITH DONATION

JOIN US FOR BREAKFAST:

7AM-1PM RESERVATIONS & WALK-INS WELCOME

MEET

VETERANS & THEIR SERVICE DOGS 8AM-1PM

Raising money for Service Dogs for Veterans who live in Indian River and St Lucie Counties to assist their veterans with hearing and mobility challenges, as well as the effects of Post Traumatic Stress (PTS).

FOR DIRECTIONS, RESERVATIONS & FULL BREAKFAST MENU:
MAISONMARTINIQUE.NET

(772) 231-7299
1605 OCEAN DRIVE
VERO BEACH, FL 32963

In honor of Veterans Day, Dogs For Life will be at Creperie at Maison Martinique for a brunch benefiting veterans. Come meet DFL service dog teams and enjoy breakfast on Saturday, November 9th, to help raise money to provide service dogs for local veterans in need.

Check Presentations



The Florida Eagles Dog Chain Club, from West Palm Beach, has donated to DFL since 2010, bringing them to Platinum donor status on the DFL Donor Tree.



Treasure Coast Jeep Club members present a check from their annual "Go Topless" event which raised more than \$3,000 for DFL, bringing the Club's total donations in recent years to over \$10,000!



The American Legion Post 81 of Melbourne celebrated "Christmas at the Bunker" on July 25. Proceeds of the fundraiser benefited DFL. Post 81 representatives visited DFL to present their check.

VB Veterans Kick Off Event for Wreaths Across America



Shelly Ferger and Wanda Johnson help kick off the local Wreaths Across America fundraiser. The event will be held on December 14th at Crestlawn Cemetery in Vero Beach.

Harry Taylor, Dog Park Manager

Dog Park Membership News

In February of this year, Dogs For Life began monthly Dog Park Membership meetings on the first Wednesday of each month at 10am, in an effort to reinstate the Dog Park Ambassador Program and educate our members on canine behavior and other useful topics.

Discussion topics have included dog park maintenance and mosquito control, lost and found property procedures, how to encourage proper play, identifying dog language, and rocket to random recalls. Future meetings will go over first aid and CPR for your dog.

We've also introduced an exciting new opportunity for members to communicate with each other via a group Facebook page. Thirty-six



members have joined the group to date, all posting pictures of their dogs at the park. Just search Facebook for "Dogs For Life," pull down the "About" tab, then scroll down until you see "Dog Park Members." Select "Join Group" and press "Request." DFL will respond within a couple of days.

DFL is grateful to the dog park members who have taken the time to continue their education and serve as ambassadors, helping with welcoming and acclimating new park members. We also truly appreciate those who sign up to assist with Meet & Greets, so that we can sign up new members more quickly in the future. And, of course, thank you to all our members who help keep our dog park clean and safe for all to enjoy.



Mark Your Calendars for April 26, 2025!



The Dogs For Life Board of Directors and Patriots For Puppies Fundraising Committee recently announced that next year's Patriots For Puppies fundraiser will be combined with the DFL Annual Awards and Graduation Ceremony.

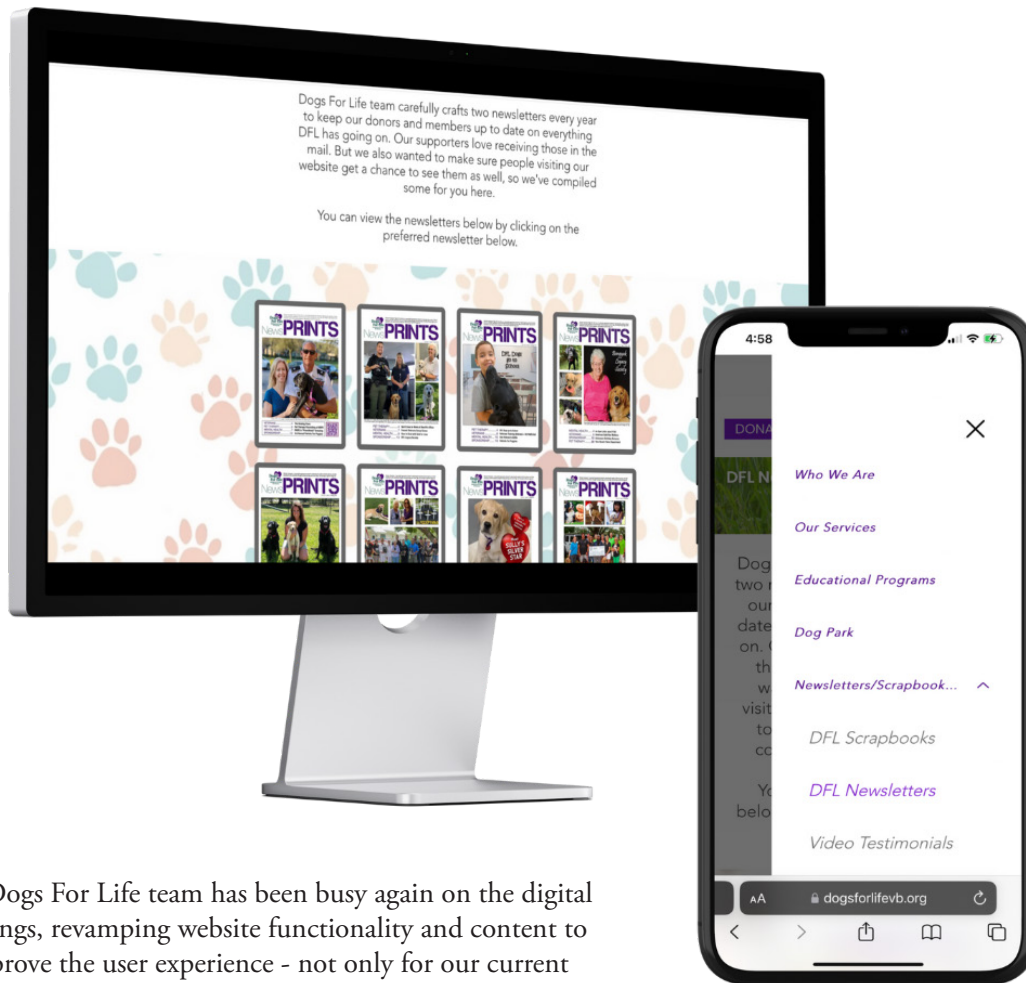
Dogs For Life Patriots Awards and Graduation Ceremony, a military-themed celebration and fundraiser, will take place at Pointe West Country Club on April 26, 2025, from 5:30 PM – 8 PM. The event will blend the fun and festivities of our signature annual fundraising gala with the heartwarming graduation ceremony for DFL's newest service dog teams.

The celebration will begin with a live performance of patriotic hits by Patti, Kim, and Dolores (formerly known as "The Dolls") singing all our favorite tunes. Dinner will be served, and then we will showcase our patriots being awarded for their service to DFL in 2024. During the event you will enjoy a silent auction and our graduation ceremony, with the opportunity to socialize with our heroes and their life-saving service dogs.

Please join us! Tickets and sponsorship opportunities are available at www.dogsforlifevb.org. With your help we look forward to breaking our \$100,000 fundraising goal for 2025!

*Dustin Tackett, Owner/Creative Director
Citrus Three Marketing & Advertising*

Website Update



The Dogs For Life team has been busy again on the digital side of things, revamping website functionality and content to better improve the user experience - not only for our current supporters, but also for people visiting the website for the very first time.

So far in 2024 alone, 4,890 people have visited the DFL website for the first time. That's 4,890 opportunities to make a first impression and hopefully garner interest in furthering our mission to help as many veterans as we possibly can.

We've reworked the website menu, cutting down on some of the repetitive information and tightening up content to make it simpler to find where information is located. Interactive content is now especially easy to find. This includes videos created for DFL as well as content we create ourselves, like the bi-annual newsletter.

We've moved the most recent newsletter to the home page of the website, and we've also created a page to host newsletters from years past. This allows users to go back and see all the incredible stories, photos, and design work put together by our contributors throughout the years. This page is in the same area as DFL's scrapbooks and video testimonials, bringing all this similar content to one location. Make sure to visit the website and check it out.

Setting the Bar High for Service Dog Health

Many characteristics comprise a great service dog. Impeccable training and favorable temperament come to mind, but the animal's health – both physical and mental – is just as important.

Dogs For Life and the other members of the ADI Breeding Cooperative take steps behind the scenes to make sure that they produce the best service dogs possible. It is sad to acknowledge that some dogs don't "make the cut." However, just as not all humans are destined for the same profession, not all dogs, even those of service dog lineage, are meant to be service dogs.

DFL service pups in training undergo a variety of examinations to ensure they are in prime condition. This is done not only to ensure the animal is in top form now, but also so that his or her future partner is not surprised by unexpected issues that may require them to replace the service dog sooner than expected.

One exam DFL highly recommends to its service dog teams is the ACVO/Epicur-sponsored complimentary eye screening, which is offered to all qualified service and working animals. In most cases, screenings like this provide peace of mind, and no

concerning conditions are uncovered. Unfortunately, one of DFL's recent service pups in training, Ranger, was diagnosed with a cataract.

From the day a service pup in training arrives at DFL, his mental fortitude is assessed in addition to his physical health. Not all pups are confident enough to be service dogs. Some pups go through a "skittish" stage, and some

of them don't grow out of it. In the case of recent service dog in training Austin, he showed signs of public anxiety. Austin took comfort in having other dogs around, something that is not the norm in a service dog household.

At DFL, we try to look on the bright side when a dog doesn't finish our program. We take comfort in knowing Ranger is in a loving home where his condition can be monitored closely. We are

thrilled that Austin likewise found a happy home with a veteran, his wife, and their female Boxer mix.

Our standards are high – and necessarily so – but we also want all our beloved dogs to live their happiest and healthiest lives, even if that means not being part of the DFL service dog program.



Dr. Walsh at Live Oak Animal Hospital takes the time to make sure a DFL pup is at ease during his vet visit.



Support Groups

Coed Veteran & First Responders PTSD

Facilitators:

Thomas R. Metzinger, USMC, LCSW, Therapist
Michael Wright, USA, (Ret.), RCSWI/MCAP

Mondays at 7:00 PM

Female Veterans & First Responders

Call for additional information

Families of Veterans & First Responders

Call for additional information

Above Meetings Held at:
Dogs For Life

1230 16th Avenue • Vero Beach, FL 32960
(772) 567-8969

Veterans Meet Up

Every Wednesday 6:00-8:00 PM

2183 Ponce De Leon Circle
Vero Beach, FL 32960

Facilitator:

Michael Wright, USA, (Ret.), RCSWI/MCAP

Supported by:
American Gold Star
Mothers of IRC



**211'S MYFLVET 1-844-MYFLVET or 2-1-1
Veteran to Veteran Support, Linkage to
Services & Suicide Prevention ... 24/7**
211TreasureCoast.org

**VETERANS/CRISIS LINE
1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

VETERAN'S RESOURCES

- IRC Veterans Service Office (Vero Beach) (772) 226-1395
- VA Community Based Clinic (Vero Beach) (772) 299-4623
- IRC Veterans Service Office (Sebastian) (772) 226-1145
- Melbourne Vet Center (Melbourne & Vero Beach) (321) 254-3410
- Next Generation Veterans of IRC (772) 532-9092
- VA Medical Center (WPB) & Women's Programs (800) 972-8262

COUNSELING/MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

- Mental Health Association (MHA) Walk-In Center (772) 569-9788
- Mental Health Collaborative (772) 217-3663
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (772) 532-5554
- New Horizons of the Treasure Coast Mobile Family Response Team (772) 778-7217 (772) 672-8445
- Suncoast Mental Health Centers (772) 564-8616

HEALTH CLINICS/HOSPITALS

- Behavioral Health Center (772) 563-4666
- TC Community Health (772) 257-8224

**Also ask your VA Social Worker & Whole Health Coordinator*

PTSD Coach Online Tools

ptsd.va.gov/apps/ptsdcoachonline/tools_menu.htm

2/2024

Tributes and Memorial Gifts

In Honor Of

Mickey Clark
Barbara Petty

Richie Keller
Linda Barberi
Shelly Ferger
Barbara Gormas

Richie Keller & Gigi
Ricky Deel

**Kathi Schumann
for Mother's Day**
Gene & Martha Schumann
Barry & Vickie Wyatt

2024 Graduation

Sally Bricker & Nick
Robyn Candarini & Spirit
Guillermo Contreras & Whiskey
Kisha Ford Torres & Kolumbo
Joan Freeman & Minnie
Ron Garrison & Buddy
Ingrid Hernandez & Chance
Brian Hughes & Indy
Kymerlee Mitala & Chocolate
Laurie Turner & Marley
Andy Watson & Gracie
Linda Barberi

In Memory Of

Michael Huston
Dorothy Courten

Robert T. Marra
Marcia Adache
Sue Bartholomew
Michelle Becher
Laura Bonney
Chris Consi
Shelly Ferger
John Granath
Karen Hanson
Ann Nolan
Mary Nolet
Susan Zelitsky

Carolyn Marra Muller
Linda Barberi

Mike Pape
Doris Tropf

Robert Saucerman
Frank Roscoe

Ryan Scott
Patrick Hopkins

Bernie Sproch
Austin & Carol Breining
Chris & Dede Gillispie
Carl Miller

Edward R. Wilenski
Keana Anna
Linda Caffrey

Tedi
Mary Margaret Hatch

Missy
Helen Terrill

Birthdays

Marcia Adache
Kathy Allston
Arleen Arsenault
Eddie Boatwright
Laura Bonney
Sally Bricker
Chris Consi
Kathleen Consi
Michelle Dale
Steve Defren
Shelly Ferger
Barbara Gormas
Jim Hyde
Dr. Nancy Kicherer
Michele Laibe
Laura Larimore
Lynne Levin
Dani Ley

Tammie Mandeville
Cheryl Marshall
Marisel Munoz Febo
Ann Nolan
Linda Reeve
Philip Tettleton
Sean Timberlake
Linda Barberi
Shelly Ferger
Barbara Gormas
Richie Keller

Kathi Schumann
Linda Barberi
Shelly Ferger
Barbara Gormas
Richie Keller
Virginia "Toddy" McKeown
Gene & Martha Schumann
Barry & Vickie Wyatt





1230 16th Avenue
Vero Beach, FL 32960
(772) 567-8969

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Save the Date

Military Themed Celebration and Fundraiser



Patriots Awards and Graduation Ceremony

Saturday, April 26, 2025 • 5:30 - 8:00 PM

Pointe West Country Club • 7500 14th Lane, Vero Beach

This annual fundraiser will benefit Dogs For Life Programs:

- Service Dog Training ★ Service Dogs for Veterans ★ Puppy Raising Program
- Veterans Training Veterans PAWS Act Program ★ Veteran PTSD Recovery and Support Group
- Pet Therapy Dog Program at VBPD ★ School Therapy Dog and S.T.A.R. Program at IRCSO
- Apprentice Trainers Program ★ Off-Leash Dog Park and Ambassador Program

Tickets and Sponsorship Opportunities available at www.dogsforlifevb.org

