



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. 23 / Issue 1 / Spring 2023



PET THERAPY .....	4	DFL Dogs go to School
VETERANS .....	8	Veterans Training Veterans – VA PAWS Act
MENTAL HEALTH ....	10	One Veteran's Battle
SPONSORSHIP .....	19	Patriots For Puppies

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# Contents

NEWSPRINTS

Vol. 23 / Issue 1 / Spring 2023

## What's New?

### Group Celebrates the Sheriff's Office Suicide and PTSD Awareness Truck Wrap



Among those gathered to celebrate the new squad vehicle are (L to R) Doug Klock, Ingrid Hernandez and Chuck Gerrald of Next Generation Veterans of IRC; Shelly Ferger, CEO of Dogs For Life; Michelle Dale, President of American Gold Star Mothers of IRC; Diane D'Angelo, Secretary/Treasurer of American Gold Star Mothers of IRC; Angela Guzenski, COO of Mental Health Association and Kris Hasenauer, CEO of Emerald Medical and service dog Jasper.

## Pages & Sections

6 Next Generation Veterans of Indian River County

7 American Gold Star Mothers of Indian River County

9 Nancy E. Kicherer, DVM

12 DFL Awards and Graduation Ceremony

14 Pet Therapy at Vero Beach Police Department

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



*Eddie Boatwright and service dog Rosie the Riveter*

## From *the* President

As the DFL Board of Directors moves into the spring and prepares for the fall of 2023, we continue to be grateful to our donors and volunteers for their over 20 years of support for DFL programs.

DFL continues to grow and expand its outreach, and we are more committed than ever to show our donors that your financial support is hard at work, all year long at DFL.

So far this year, DFL graduated the largest class of service, hearing and veteran dog teams in its history. DFL also placed its first therapy dog with the Indian River County Sheriff's Office, thereby expanding our mental health commitment to the children of IRC.

The Board remains thankful for the hard work and compassion of the DFL staff members. The staff is critical to ensuring that DFL's programs run smoothly and the dogs remain happy and healthy so that DFL can produce the best service dogs ever!

## From *the* Founder & CEO

A new Indian River County Sheriff's Office vehicle (see photo facing page) is bringing attention to the Sheriff's Traumatic Advocate Response (STAR) Team, whose members are dedicated to helping deputies deal with post-traumatic stress.

Dogs For Life representatives were in attendance when Sheriff Eric Flowers unveiled the new vehicle in November, along with members of Gold Star Mothers, Next Generation Veterans, Indian River County Mental Health Association and Emerald Medical. The new squad vehicle is marked with each of these organizations' logos and advertises that additional resources are available.

March 22 was a special day at DFL. Although it was sad to see Laura Bonney retire after being with DFL since 2011, we are happy that she will continue to contract on an as needed basis. So, it's not good bye, it's Happy Retirement. We enjoyed a party with Laura that included cupcakes, pizza and many memories.

DFL would also like to congratulate:

- Ann Nolan promoted to Business and Administration Assistant
- Chris Consi as DFL's new Finance Manager
- Betty Giacometti as Finance Assistant
- Heidi Bates, US Army Veteran, as Assistant to Veterans Training Program
- Harry Taylor as Maintenance Manager



*Shelly Ferger and service dog St. Cloud*



*L to R kneeling: Steve Defren, US Army Veteran with Rosie, Shelly Ferger, Heidi Bates with Saint Nick, Ann Nolan with Spirit. L to R standing: Chris Consi, Betty Giacometti, Laura Bonney, and Cheryl Marshall, US Air Force Veteran.*

# DFL Dogs go to School

By Katherine Bauman

Since the inception of the Indian River County Sheriff's Office Therapy K9 Unit, Sgt. Ron Garrison, Deputy Mark Birtel and Deputy Dave Partin have become more popular and approachable to students and staff at the schools they visit each day.

The Therapy K9 Unit was established in 2021 and predominately works inside Indian River County Schools. Chip is assigned to Vero Beach Elementary; Gracie is at Imagine Schools at South Vero; and Ellie Mae is based at Sebastian River

High School but rotates to multiple schools throughout the county.

The K9s help the school resource officers build a rapport with students and get them to engage with law enforcement on a whole new level.

"All three handlers and their K9 partners are proud to work together to help reduce anxiety, enhance self-

esteem and open up

communication lines with both students and the public," Sheriff Flowers said.

A therapy dog's job is to bring comfort, joy and unconditional love to those they come into contact with each day.

The K9s also bridge the gap between a student and person of authority, said Sgt. Garrison. "We have kids come up and engage with the dog who typically wouldn't approach us," he said.

A typical day for a therapy dog is one of interaction with students, staff, teachers, administrators, and the public. During rotating visits to district schools two to three times a month, the dogs visit each classroom, spending five- to 10-minutes with the students and teachers.

"Chip comes into work with me each morning and he greets the kids in the courtyard of the school,



L to R: DFL Treasurer Kathi G. Schumann, Sergeant Ron Garrison with Ellie Mae, Deputy Mark Birtel with Chip and Sheriff Eric Flowers

Their K9 companions are Chip, an 18-month-old black Labrador retriever handled by Deputy Birtel; Ellie Mae, a 3 ½-year-old chocolate lab, handled by Sgt. Garrison; and Gracie, a 5-year-old black lab-mix handled by Deputy Partin.

The Sheriff's Office recently welcomed Chip and Ellie Mae to the program during a presentation conducted at Dogs For Life and attended by Sheriff Eric Flowers, DFL CEO Shelly Ferger, DFL Board member Kathi G. Schumann, Sgt. Garrison and Deputy Birtel.

"We are very thankful for the generous donations we have received," said Sheriff Flowers. "And we especially want to thank Dogs For Life's Kathi G. Schumann and Shelly Ferger who donated Chip, as well as the necessary equipment and training for both K9s."

## Pet Therapy

in the administration office and during all lunches,” said Deputy Birtel.

Part of the school resource officer’s job is to respond to calls for service from a teacher, Children & Family Services, the school’s nurse or administrator.

“When someone from Children & Family Services comes to the school it’s typically to talk to a child,” said Sgt. Garrison. “The kid often feels better talking to the case worker with the dog in the room. Many times they won’t open up until they see the dog. They become less afraid.”

Deputy Birtel said he has started responding to medical calls in the schools, bringing Chip to the nurse’s office. Chip’s presence often helps the child relax by taking the focus off their injury. “Chip can’t fix what’s hurting them, but he can give comfort.”

The therapy dogs also help during times of grief. A couple weeks ago when a kindergarten teacher died suddenly, the dogs were there to help the students and staff deal with their sadness, said Deputy Birtel.

The effect these dogs have on students leaves a lasting impression on their handlers. “Especially when we go into a classroom of students with disabilities,” said Sgt. Garrison. “I’ve seen kids who don’t speak at all engage with these dogs.”

There’s a risk-reward dynamic at work. Deputy Birtel will



*Chip is identified on Deputy Mark Birtel's squad car.*

reward a student by allowing them to take Chip’s leash and walk him to class. “Many kids who at first were afraid are now my biggest Chip fans,” said Deputy Birtel.

Ferger founded Dogs For Life in 2001 to improve the quality of life for people and dogs through the training of service and therapy dogs and operating an off-leash dog park. DFL is an accredited member of Assistance Dogs International, a worldwide coalition of non-profit programs that train and place Assistance Dogs.

“Dogs For Life is proud to partner with the Sheriff’s Office with the placement of Chip, who is perfect as a comfort dog for the school resource program,” said Ferger. “Our goal is to have a dog in every elementary school in Indian River County.

“We owe a big thank you to Kathi G. Schumann for sponsoring this program,” said Ferger.

The sheriff’s K9 handlers spoke highly of the training they received from Dogs For Life.

Working with Ferger, who is director of training, and trainer Marcia Adache, Sergeant Garrison and Deputy Birtel earned American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen and DFL Facility Dog Certification.

To contribute to this program, please visit the website at [dogsforlifevb.org](http://dogsforlifevb.org).



*L to R: Sergeant Ron Garrison with Ellie Mae, DFL Trainer Marcia Adache and Deputy Mark Birtel with Chip*

*Chuck Gerrald, USA, First Sergeant*  
*Next Generation Veterans of Indian River County*

## Veterans Get Support in VB



I do not know of any community that supports their veterans like Vero Beach. It is the place to be if you are a vet! Every weekend there seems to be an event to help our veterans and their families.

Veterans make up 19% of Indian River County's

population. Add in family members and you begin to understand the strong support here.

Despite this, many may not be familiar with the organizations behind the PTSD support program offered by Next Gen Veterans of IRC. Next Gen partners with Dogs For Life, the Mental Health Association in IRC, and Goldstar Mothers of IRC to offer the program. Each of these organizations is represented on the program's board and is vital to its success.

Dogs For Life provides the facility to hold our weekly support group meetings, which Next Gen staffs with peer leaders. I work with the predominantly male group and Ingrid Hernandez, USA, is the peer leader for the female group. Heidi Bates, USA, who recently joined DFL as Veteran Training Program Assistant, helps with administration of the groups.

All of our facilitators are veterans, as only a veteran can understand another veteran. MHA provides our female facilitator, Paula Robinson, USA, RMHCI. From Emerald Medical comes another one of our facilitators, Kris Hasenauer, USA, PA-C. Kris' practice provides traditional medical care as well as some new options for the treatment of PTSD. Our other facilitators are Tom Metzinger, USMC, LLSW of Suggestive Minds and Michael Wright, USA, (Ret.) RSCWI/MCAP.

Michelle Dale and Gold Star Mothers of IRC provide the significant funding necessary to operate

the PTSD support program. Proceeds from the Gold Star Mothers' Annual Walk-A-Thon for Military Suicide Awareness keep the program alive.

The program includes more than just support group meetings. We schedule social events to help our veterans reintegrate into the community. We monitor our vets for behavioral changes and triage any issues. We provide 3 emergency visits with the veteran's counselor of choice, after which MHA offers them long-term mental health services.

The PTSD support program is going strong. Our meetings are well attended with both male and female veterans and first responders. Many of our members are living healthy, active lives again. Families are being reunited, and vets are re-entering the workforce.

Thank you to the program's board members who have partnered in this effort and to our generous community for making this program such a success. It is truly a team effort.

**Vero Beach Veterans  
and Boozefighters MC**  
*present*  
**BIKERS SUPPORTING VETERANS  
INFO FAIR AND CHARITY EVENT**  
**11 AM - 6 PM • MAY 27, 2023 • (MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND)**  
**2500 15TH AVENUE, VERO BEACH**  
**Family Friendly • Food • Music**  
**Kids Activities • Cornhole Tournament**  
**Info - Call Jerzey Bill at 214-763-8133**  
**Suggested Donation \$20 per person  
to benefit DFL and NEXT GENERATION VETS**

*Michelle Dale, President*

*American Gold Star Mothers of Indian River County*

# Walk-A-Thon Raises \$67,000

The American Gold Star Mothers of Indian River County's 4th Annual Walk-A-Thon for Military/Veteran Suicide Awareness on November 6, 2022 at Riverside Park in Vero Beach was a huge success. It rained on us three different times but it didn't change the dynamics of the over 400 walkers and vendors in attendance, all of whom came to support our military and veterans who are struggling with "the battle within." Walk-A-Thon proceeds of \$67,000, distributed to Dogs For Life, Next Generation Veterans of Indian River County and the Mental Health Association in Indian River County, will keep our PTSD Recovery and Support Sessions and Veterans Meet Ups going strong, creating a circle of healing for those in our county who are struggling with PTSD. We also donated to the Indian River Sheriff's Department to help pay for the detailing on the new PTSD truck, which daily shares our important information throughout our county. Plans already are underway for the 5th Annual Walk-A-Thon, scheduled for November 5, 2023! Thank you in advance to our Indian River County community for helping us spread awareness and support our

military and veterans.

Our American Gold Star Mothers of Indian River County are grateful for the many veteran and community groups who support our efforts throughout the year, and we try our best to reciprocate. We sponsored and participated in the successful Patriots For Puppies fundraiser for DFL and the Mental Health Association Motown Rocks Benefit, both of which raised funds to support our veterans. We support Wreaths Across America and help distribute and clean up the wreaths that adorn our veterans' gravesites throughout the Christmas holidays. We are actively involved with many WWII veterans whom we have had the privilege to meet over the past few years and help to organize events



in their honor. With our help, 13 of our WWII veterans were recognized at the recent Vero Beach High School Red, White and Blue 30th Annual Concert! We sponsored a 98th birthday party for one of them at the American Legion Post 39, as well as a drive-by in his honor. He even got to ride on one of the many motorcycles that participated in the event!

In closing, I wish to express our gratitude to Kathi G. Schumann and Shelly for believing in us. They give us the support, help, and guidance we need to continue moving forward with American Gold Star Mothers of IRC.



***Michelle Dale presented checks to The Mental Health Association, Dogs For Life and Next Generation Veterans of IRC***

*L to R front row: Amy Wagner and Angelia Guzenski of the Mental Health Association, Diana D'Angelo and Michelle Dale of American Gold Star Mothers of IRC, Shelly Ferger with DFL, and Vanessa Bartoszewicz, AGSMIRC Volunteer. L to R back row: Chuck Gerrald and Dave Klock with Next Generation Veterans of IRC.*

## Veterans

*Harper Marsolek, PAWS Coordinator*

*Center for Development and Civic Engagement  
West Palm Beach VA Healthcare System*

# Veterans in Pilot Program

The Puppies Assisting Wounded Service Members (PAWS) Act of 2021 requires the Veterans Health Administration to implement a 5-year pilot program to provide canine training to eligible veterans that are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. The West Palm Beach VA Healthcare System (WPBVAHCS) and Dogs For Life recently completed the first cohort of the pilot program. Six veterans actively participated in the program working alongside established service dog teams and service dogs in training. The veterans had a hands-on opportunity to learn how service dogs are trained, receive education on canine behavior, and find out about the laws pertaining to service dogs, all while stepping outside of their comfort zones and engaging with members of the community. The WPBVAHCS is proud to partner with DFL to offer this pilot program for veterans receiving VA care. Veterans involved have reported many positive changes, and we look forward to continuing to work with Dogs For Life for more positive results to come!



For additional information: [VHAWPBPAWSPilotProgram@va.gov](mailto:VHAWPBPAWSPilotProgram@va.gov)



*L to R: Lloyd Howard with Honcho, Ronald Celli with Elvis, Lashawn Logan with Rosie, Ronald Pierre-Paul with Sully, Rachel Dunn with Judy and Gene Hoover with Otis.*



*Nancy E. Kicherer, DVM*

# Keeping Your Service Dog Happy

Congratulations to all members of Dogs For Life as we welcome a new class of graduates. It “takes a village” to achieve this milestone. We are all grateful and excited to enter a new phase as one class moves on and the next generation of trainees will begin their journey.

Our task is to maintain the high standards set forth by the ADA and Dogs For Life, both in handler and service dog behavior along with maintaining the dogs’ health and welfare. To care for and utilize a service animal is a privilege that comes with great responsibilities.

Veterinarians and animal care specialists can help us to keep our dogs healthy and advise us on how to maintain their mental and physical well-being. Diet, weight management, adequate exercise, training and behavior guidance, along with being aware of our dogs’ vulnerabilities, will assist us in having a happy and long association with this incredible gift of such a beneficial, and in many cases, lifesaving animal.

The service dog is tasked with being healthy, mentally stable, physically strong and consistently reliable. To help the dog meet these goals, there are a few simple guidelines to follow.

Joint health is essential, because without the ability to move and assist physically, service dogs cannot perform their jobs. Their lives will drastically change if physical movement is hindered. Their shoulders, elbows, hips and stifles (knees) are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of injury from carrying excessive weight, which causes irreversible trauma to joints.

Since all service dogs will be neutered, weight management is a lifelong challenge. Dog food is not generally weight management friendly, so examining how many calories your dog needs is critical to keeping their weight appropriate to their activity levels.

Health management of a service dog requires active participation by the handler. Handlers can educate themselves on any given animal health subject or concern at the website [Veterinarypartner.com](http://Veterinarypartner.com). The information on this website is reliable and can be trusted.

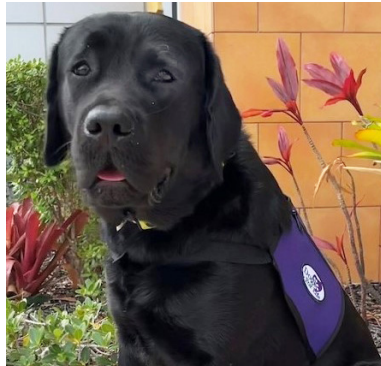
Mental stability and well-being along with weight management can be achieved through organized handler/service dog activities. Some examples of devices used to maintain mental health of the service dog are: Totark Dog Digging toys; Goody Box toys and treats; Nerf Dog Puzzle Treat Ball; Kong Genius interactive toys; toothbrushes that make noise while the dog chews it; and many others.

Many service dogs are limited by the handler’s needs and/or physical abilities and do not get regular exercise. Physical activity is a true stabilizer for the service dog. Purposeful movement helps these

working dogs to feel balanced and calm. Movement helps to avoid excessive boredom, which service dogs experience as they wait for their human companion throughout the day. If a handler cannot exercise his service dog daily, then an alternative should be found.

A healthy service dog needs our attention in order to work to the best of their ability and perform their tremendous service. Consulting regularly with your veterinarian is important along with maintaining wellness programs that help predict health issues.

Also of critical importance is knowing where emergency treatment can be obtained, understanding what your insurance policy will and won’t cover, and having a credit card to cover unexpected healthcare expenses. A health credit card such as Care Credit ([Carecredit.com](http://Carecredit.com)) is an option to help you cover unanticipated veterinary costs for your service dog.



*Nancy Kicherer's service dog Stryker*

*Chris English, USA Veteran*

## One Veteran's Battle

Hollywood has made millions, and big pharma has made billions from PTSD. The world loves to watch movies of service members going through hell, coming home, and battling their demons to emerge victorious. I sure wish that is how it really went, at least for me.

As a grunt we are told to suck it up, because showing emotion is a weakness. I have to agree that showing weakness in combat is not good. However, what the green machine never told me was how to deal with all of the emotion when I was no longer in combat.

It didn't take long for me to fall apart once I got out of the military. I suddenly had all of this time on my hands and my demons attacked at once. The military moved on, and I felt betrayed by the entity I had dedicated my life to.

Though surrounded by loved ones, I felt out of place and thought no one would understand me. I had seen and done things that made me change my opinion of myself. I could never tell anyone, especially my loved ones. Instead, I put on my death mask and pretended everything was ok.

Every time I saw my reflection in the mirror, the only word that came to mind was MONSTER! Every time I closed my eyes I relived the horrors, but the VA doctors said it was normal, that I just needed to process my traumas.

A week-long government-sanctioned PTSD program – yes, only a week! – “cured” me, but my mind knew otherwise. After a year bouncing in and out of these programs, I lost hope. Something had to be wrong with me. Everyone else in the programs was happy, right?



As the demons slowly took over, I eased my symptoms with alcohol and prescription medications. I was able to get some rest and manage my fears – at least that’s what I told myself – but I was toxic. I wanted everyone around me to hurt like I was.

The realization of what I was doing to my loved ones shattered me. I knew committing suicide would hurt my family, but I began thinking they would be better off without me. I asked my wife (my angel) to leave me and take the kids, money, and even the dog. She refused, and I didn't understand why. Now I know it was because she was in this fight with me. At the time I couldn't see it and just wanted to die.

I waited until my family went to bed, drank a fifth of whiskey, and took a handful of Xanax. With my loaded pistol in my mouth, I slowly started to pull the trigger, just as my wife happened to check on me. I tried to hide the gun, but she saw it. She immediately drove me to an Army hospital where they admitted me to the mental health ward.

It hit me what I had done after I got sober. This was my breaking point. I had not spoken to God for years. I was mad at him, and figured he wouldn't let someone like me into heaven anyway. I got on my knees and let God have it with both barrels! Once I calmed down, I asked for his help. I made a pact with God that if he would help me, I would put everything I have into getting healthy. God answered me that day.

The next four years I fought like the third monkey on the ramp to Noah's ark when it was beginning to rain. The first thing I realized I had to do was talk to someone about my thoughts and feelings, but YUK - talk to whom? A civilian would only want to hear the war stories I did not want to relive. Instead, I turned to my brothers in arms who had “been there and done that.”

One of my buddies got me into a group. When it was my turn to talk about my trauma, I felt completely alone. I thought if I told them the truth they would see me for the MONSTER I really was. I then remembered my pact with God. God was holding up his end of it, so now it was my turn.

Telling my story, I went through every emotion. I was crying, angry, and happy (nice job grunt) all

at the same time. I looked at the floor because I felt ashamed. I feared seeing judgment in their eyes. However, when I finally got up the nerve to look up, I saw them crying with me!

When I finished, I stood there, confused and expecting the worst. An old Vietnam veteran came toward me. I was sure he was going to punch me! I braced myself, but he threw his arms around me and said, "It's ok brother, I know what you're going through. I have been there and done that." There was no judgment, only compassion. He called to check on me over the next few months, and took the time to listen. I started to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

There was a lot more work ahead. I started learning how to manage my triggers and began building my five pillars of healing (Mental, Physical, Spiritual, Financial, and Family) from the ground up. I had to learn how to forgive myself and realize that God never condemned me; I condemned myself. I had to take responsibility for causing pain to my loved ones and ask for forgiveness. To my surprise, I was forgiven, and our family started to heal.

Over the next few years, I worked like my life depended on my healing, because it did. Somehow I had done it - I WAS HAPPY AGAIN! I was smiling again, and when the demons showed their faces, I fought like crazy to get rid of them. It worked.

I will never be the one to say there is a cure for PTSD – I know there is not – but I will be the first to say that you can lead a happy life while fighting PTSD. Some days you lose some battles to your demons, but those days start to become few and far between.

Once in a healthy place, it became my mission to help my brothers and sisters in arms. I don't want our heroes to go down my path, or worse. I feel their pain. I hurt when they hurt. I bleed when they bleed. We are all our brothers' keepers. And just like a fellow veteran helped me in my darkest times, I will be here for you in your darkest times, because I HAVE BEEN THERE AND DONE THAT!

The strongest thing I have ever done was ask for help. I love you all, and remember - always fight like that third monkey!

# 2022-2023 Graduation at DFL

Graduation day represented a great accomplishment for 12 of our Service/Hearing Dog teams. Their dedication and commitment to training — made by humans and dogs — was apparent when each team accepted the laurels that signified their success. A special “Thank You” to all of DFL’s amazing Donors and Volunteers for making these success stories a reality.

## Graduates

Tim Barnes and Gypsy  
 Steve Defren (US Army) and Rosie  
 Jim Hyde (US Navy) and Otis  
 Nancy Kicherer and Stryker  
 Michele Laibe and Lua  
 Sarah Lang and Bradley

Barbara McCoy (US Air Force)  
 and Mercedes  
 Howard Teich (US Army) and Tucker  
 Charlie Watson (US Army) and Sam  
 Gary Wilson (US Army) and Swift

## IRCSO School Resource Dogs

Mark Birtel and Chip  
 Ron Garrison and Ellie Mae



*From left, all 12 Graduates pictured are: Deputy Mark Birtel with Chip, Sergeant Ron Garrison with Ellie Mae, Howard Teich with Tucker, Michele Laibe with Lua, Barbara McCoy with Mercedes, Tim Barnes with Gypsy, Gary Wilson with Swift, Jim Hyde with Otis, Nancy Kicherer with Stryker, Sarah Lang with Bradley, Steve Defren with Rosie and Charlie Watson with Sam.*



*From left, Graduates receiving quilts from Treasure Coast Quilts for Veterans are: Charlie Watson with Sam, Deputy Mark Birtel with Chip, Barbara McCoy with Mercedes, Flora Newhouse and Devon Williams of Treasure Coast Quilts for Veterans, Sergeant Ron Garrison with Ellie Mae, Gary Wilson with Swift, Tim Barnes with Gypsy, Steve Defren with Rosie, Jim Hyde with Otis, and Howard Teich with Tucker.*

# 2022 Volunteer Award Recipients

- Kathi G. Schumann Award* ..... Linda Barberi
- Military Veteran Trainer of the Year Award* ..... Don Peterson (US Army, Ret.)
- Volunteer of the Year Awards*..... Cheryl Marshall (US Air Force, Ret.)  
Phillip Tettleton
- Individual Philanthropist Award*..... Earl Tindol (US Army)
- Corporate Philanthropist Awards*..... American Gold Star Mothers of IRC  
Dyer Mazda Subaru  
LEB Printing & Design  
Live Oak Animal Hospital
- Puppy Sponsor Awards* ..... Linda and Edgar Duncan  
Judith Hansen and Pablo Gonzalez  
Kathi G. Schumann

Special Thank you to Lee Orre, Orre Action Photo



Cheryl Marshall, Volunteer of the Year Award recipient with Nick



DFL President Eddie Boatwright presents the Kathi G. Schumann Award to Linda Barberi.



DFL CEO Shelly Ferber and DFL Trainer Marcia Adache present Steve Defren and Rosie their graduation ID Cards and Service Dog Jacket.



DFL President Eddie Boatwright presents the Volunteer of the Year Award to Phillip Tettleton with Sully



It was a beautiful day with the largest crowd ever assembled for an Award and Graduation Ceremony. DFL is thankful for our Volunteers and Donors.

*Lieutenant Phil Huddy, Vero Beach Police Department*

## Pet Therapy at VBPD

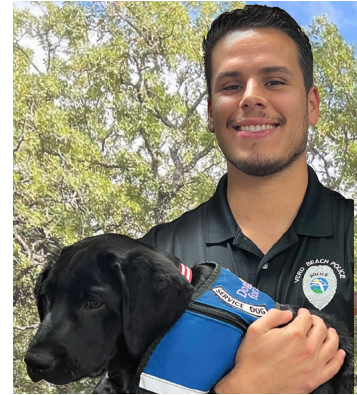
It has been a wonderful start to our partnership with Dogs For Life. Our various shifts and divisions were introduced to a multitude of volunteers and service dogs during the initial implementation of the Vero Beach Police Department's therapy dog program. Our partnership has also garnered interest from local news media outlets, promoting the importance of service and therapy dogs in the lives of first responders. Currently, volunteers and



*VBPD Police Officers with DFL Volunteer Kimberley Mann-Day and Elvis*

A symbiotic relationship has also developed between the volunteers, canines, and our employees and first responders. Most of our volunteers are former service members or civilians dealing with their own internal battles. The ability for them to interact with our officers and employees, with their canines as the conduit for that interaction, has been an added benefit and has assisted in the overall mental wellness of the volunteers.

Our organization continues to develop and reassess our therapy dog program in order to serve as a guide for other emergency service agencies interested in creating their own program. In the future, I hope to have some of our own officers be assigned service dogs to assist our members and citizens following critical and traumatic incidents. With the assistance of Dogs For Life, I know we can make that happen. Thank you to all the volunteers and their service dogs for assisting in our therapy dog program.



their service dogs visit our facility twice a week and have started attending our in-service training sessions as well.

*Detective Eddie Somoza with Nick*

Dogs For Life's newest canines-in-training, Bullet, Spirit, and Saint Nick, have had some first time experiences inside our building. It was the first time that all three had negotiated stairs and had experienced a ride in an elevator. All three overcame those obstacles with very little apprehension. The interaction between our employees and the pups continues to be beneficial in their development as service dogs.



*VBPD Police Officers with DFL Volunteer Meg Peterson and Rosie*

# Foster a Puppy? Yes!

Would you enjoy caring for a service dog or puppy? Are you interested in becoming a dog trainer one day? If so, join us for DFL's next workshop and learn what it takes to become a puppy raiser or foster parent at DFL!

Volunteer puppy raisers and foster families support DFL's mission. But did you know it could benefit you too?

Dogs, and especially puppies, make us happy. That's no secret. Studies have shown that dogs can reduce depression and alleviate stress and loneliness. Research suggests that simply petting a dog lowers levels of the stress hormone cortisol.

Are there are periods when you could foster a puppy or older service dog, even if your lifestyle doesn't allow you to care for a dog full-time?

Becoming a DFL puppy raiser or foster parent may be perfect for you!

When DFL pups reach a year to 18 months old, they are placed with local DFL clients who continue to train at DFL. Many of the service dog teams who recently graduated include pups who were raised by DFL volunteers in attendance at the graduation ceremony. It is a very rewarding, heartwarming experience to see a pup you fostered be placed with their partner and eventually graduate with him or her as a certified service dog team.

If you are willing to provide a loving home and can devote the time to attend weekly classes and other events, contact DFL at (772) 567-8969 to secure your spot in the Puppy Raising & Foster Dog Program Workshop scheduled for June 16, 2023. We look forward to welcoming more volunteers into the program!



## Volunteers Attend DFL Workshops

DFL recently hosted two "Puppies in Flight" (PIF) training workshops for American Airlines volunteers.

PIF is a partnership program with Assistance Dogs International (ADI). Through the program, American Airlines employees volunteer their time and flight benefits to transport assistance dogs on American Airlines flights.

DFL, being ADI accredited and a member of ADI's Breeding Cooperative, is eligible to receive puppies donated by other members. Some breeding cooperative members are local, such as Southeastern Guides Dogs in Palmetto, Florida, but most are not. Thanks to the generosity of PIF volunteers, puppies donated to DFL by members in other states can be transported safely to Florida at no cost to DFL.

Traveling in the passenger cabin with an animal, especially a young puppy, presents unique challenges. Airline employees must be trained on topics such as puppy protocols and training equipment before volunteering for a "transport." A transport could involve delivering a pup to its foster family, escorting a dog to a training center, or simply familiarizing the animal with the sights and sounds of air travel, from the airport experience to the flight itself.

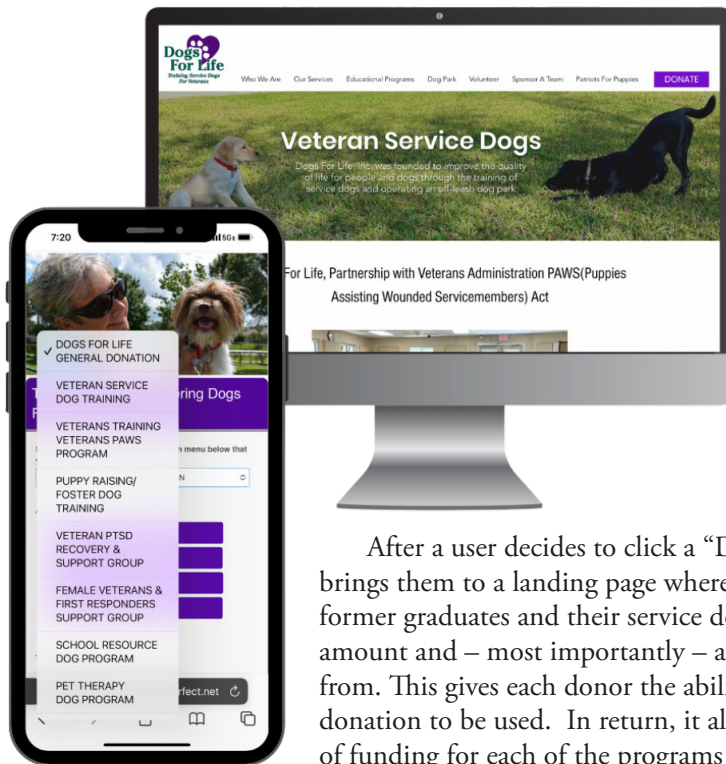
American Airlines employees including Charlene Brandes, Lucritta Oneal, and Janet Morla participated in DFL's recent workshops.



*Bullet and Nick sit for AA employees Charlene Brandes and Lucritta Oneal.*

# New Donation Process

By Dustin Tackett, Citrus Three Social Media Marketing



Dogs For Life is constantly looking for ways to improve the experience for those interacting with the website – and that goes for users wanting to donate to any of the crucial programs we offer our veterans and first responders. It's important to us that donors can find any information they may need and that it's a smooth, accessible process. With that in mind, DFL has revamped the donation process that occurs through the website.

It may appear the same on the surface – a handful of donation buttons scattered throughout the site – but it's an entirely different situation behind the scenes.

After a user decides to click a “DONATE” button on the DFL website, it brings them to a landing page where they'll find a wonderful picture of one of our former graduates and their service dog, along with some options about donation amount and – most importantly – a drop-down list of programs to choose from. This gives each donor the ability to tell us exactly how he or she wants the donation to be used. In return, it allows us to categorize donations and keep track of funding for each of the programs here at Dogs For Life.

This automated system not only gives our donors more control over what exactly is happening with their charitable donations, but it also frees up time on our end and allows us to center more of our focus on providing assistance to veterans and first responders in need of our programs.

What's Next?

There are some other exciting website projects on the horizon that the Dogs For Life team has been working hard on behind the scenes, and we can't wait for you all to see it come to fruition. These next projects focus less on the literal functionality of the website, and more on providing a fun experience for those interested in learning more about DFL and the journey that got us here.

## Generator Installed

DFL applied for a grant from the John's Island Foundation last year to purchase and install an emergency generator for the DFL Administrative offices and Training Center. DFL is thankful to report that the grant was awarded and the generator has been installed. We wish to express our deep appreciation to the Foundation for their past, current, and future support of our organization. Support toward capital projects such as this allows us to direct more funds toward DFL's programs, for which we are grateful.



Service dog Bullet poses with the new generator.



# Service Dog Re-Certifications

Did you know that DFL re-certifies every service dog in our program every year? As part of the ADI Accreditation, owner and service dog must be performing their required public obedience and task work to maintain an annual certification status.

**Class of 2015**

Wanda Haaland and Lola

**Class of 2016**

Bob Cheshire (USN) and Bo

**Class of 2017**

Corinne Cruickshank and Aya  
Mark Poziomek and Ranger

**Class of 2018**

Al Cabral (USA) and Coco  
Richie Keller (USMC) and Gigi  
Perry Martin (USAF) and Sassy  
Judith Ricard and Fitz  
Judy Schmidt (USAF) and Bentley

**Class of 2019**

Sue Bergman and Spencer  
Michael Bores (USA) and Bandit  
Barbara Gormas and Lola  
Bill Moruzzi (USA) and Remington  
Roxanne Pagliaroli and Swag

**Class of 2020**

Lauren Carr and Coco  
Jessica Jacobs and Honey  
Tammie Mandeville and Poppy  
Elizabeth McGoldrick and Oliver  
Kimberley Mann-Day (USN) and Elvis  
Howard Rizio (USMC) and St. Cloud  
Earl Tindol, (USAR) and Arrow  
Claude Vitali (USMC) and Beebe

**Class of 2021**

Resharrrd Coleman (USN) and Zoey  
Kris Hasenauer (USA) and Jasper  
Diane Kimball (USN) and Ralfee  
Dani Ley and Ollie  
Dennis Och and Zoe  
Sean Timberlake (USA) and Judy

**Class of 2022**

Christopher Adams (USN) and  
Dozer  
Andy Beebe (USAF) and Truffle  
Marisel Munoz Febo (USAF) and  
Honcho  
Marty Pillar and Mellie  
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  
Ron Garrison and Ellie Mae  
Jim Hyde (USN) and Otis  
Dr. Nancy Kicherer and Stryker  
Michele Laib and Lua  
Sarah Lang and Bradley  
Barbara McCoy (USAF) and  
Mercedes  
Howard Teich (USA) and Tucker  
Charlie Watson (USA) and Sam  
Gary Wilson (USA) and Swift



Michelle Laib with Lua and Elizabeth McGoldrick with Oliver



Bob Cheshire (USN) with Bo and DFL Training employee Ann Nolan



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



Tammie Mandeville with Poppy



Dennis Och with Zoe, Sean Timberlake (USA) with Judy and Howard Rizio (USMC) with St. Cloud

# In the “Nick” of Time for Christmas

December’s holiday season heralded a special arrival at DFL. No, not the bearded guy in the red-suit – in this case we mean the black lab pup aptly dubbed “St. Nicholas”!

St. Nicholas, or “Nick” for short, was donated by Southeastern Guides Dogs in Palmetto, Florida. He was just 8 weeks old when DFL volunteer puppy raiser Cheryl Marshall, (USAF, Ret.) drove across the state to pick him up and bring him back to Vero Beach.

Nick settled quickly into his foster home and made fast friends with the other DFL pups. Stryker and Chance, both nearly a year old at that point, were very patient with Nick and happily took on the role of his “nannies.” Nick especially enjoyed running around after Spirit and Bullet, just 2.5 months his senior. All of the DFL pups helped to teach Nick the important skill of playing with other dogs.

Nick began DFL training classes in January. He has proven to be a fast learner, making great strides with socialization skills, manners, and basic commands.

Still the smallest of DFL’s puppies-in-training, Nick makes up for it with his exuberant personality. One of Nick’s first outings was to attend the DFL annual Christmas lunch, where he met his namesake (pictured).

It would not be possible to train DFL pups like Nick, Stryker, Chance, Spirit, and Bullet without puppy sponsors including Linda and Edgar Duncan, Judith Hansen and Pablo Gonzalez, and Kathi G. Schumann.

These sponsors cover DFL’s costs of raising and training future service dogs for veterans and others in need. Recent graduates benefitting from the generosity of these sponsors include Steve Defren (USA) and Rosie; Nancy Kicherer and Stryker; Sarah Lang and Bradley; and Gary Wilson (USA) and Swift.



Jason Patzer (USMC) aka Santa, and St. Nicholas

## DFL Christmas Party 2022



As the number of DFL Service, Hearing and Veteran Dog Teams increases, so does the size of the DFL Christmas Party. The 2022 annual Christmas Party was one of the biggest and best parties we’ve ever held at the Pointe West Country Club. Each year the DFL Board of Directors, Team Members, key volunteers, and staff gather to enjoy lunch and fellowship.

# Patriots For Puppies – Salute to Heroes

DFL's 2nd Annual Patriots For Puppies saluted heroes, past and present, at the military-themed fundraiser held on February 4, 2023. Pointe West Country Club provided a welcoming venue and delicious food while DJ Jerry and The Dolls kept things lively for listening and dancing fun with golden oldies from the 50's and 60's.

DFL's heroes include our sponsors, donors, friends in attendance and, especially, the volunteers who helped make the night a sold-out event and a goal-busting \$107,800 fundraiser. The proceeds will be used to enhance the lives of our veterans and their service dogs.



Ingrid Hernandez (USA) and Chance



L to R, Linda Barberi, Christi Knight, Phyllis Albra and Shelly Ferger



L to R, Richie Keller (USMC) with service dog Gigi, Dani and Michael Ley with Ollie

Military Themed Golden Oldies Dance & Show

**Dogs For Life**  
Training Service Dogs For Veterans

**2nd Annual Patriots For Puppies**

A Special Thank You To Our Sponsors

“Presenting”

★ Anonymous ★  
★ “In Honor of All Veterans” ★

“Puppy”

Linda Barberi & Bob Marra

“Hero”

“Paws”

Mike & Laura Hewitt  
Darrell & Susan Horn  
Jack & Susie Ley  
Ed & Barbara O'Sullivan  
Lee Orre Action Photo  
Patricia Pierce  
Fritz & Bonnie Spitzmiller  
Archie S. Wingfield Jr.  
Charitable Fund

“Tail Wag”

# Speaker Series

*Steve Blum, America's VetDogs*

When the iconic photograph of yellow lab Sully keeping vigil at the casket President George H. W. Bush went viral, America's attention on service dogs was brought into stark relief.

Sully was a graduate of America's VetDogs service dog programs, according to Steve Blum, volunteer ambassador and guest speaker to the DFL Continuing Education Class in March. America's VetDogs was created by the Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind, Inc. in 2003 to provide assistance dogs to America's wounded veterans. In 2006, it became a separate 501(c)(3) corporation.

Steve told the class about the organization's ten-acre campus in Smithtown, NY. It includes breeding kennels and in-residence training facilities that accommodate clients for their two-week stay free of charge.

America's VetDogs' breeding program produces up to 350 dogs per year. At about eight weeks, dogs are sent to puppy raisers to start basic obedience training and socialization until the dog is old enough to be accepted into a training program. Puppy raising is a 12- to 14-month commitment.

America's VetDogs utilizes correctional

institutions from Maine to Florida for puppy raising, Steve explained. It's a win-win for everyone involved: America's VetDogs and their clients benefit because more assistance dogs can be placed with disabled veterans; inmates are able to give back to society and learn valuable life skills; and the puppies win by being placed more quickly and spending less time in the kennels.

America's VetDogs owns the service dogs for the life of the dog even after it is retired from active service. As for Sully, following his Presidential service, he was appointed to the rank of hospital corpsman second class and now works as a therapy dog with patients at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland.



*Robert Cross, WWII Navy Veteran*



On January 20, 2023, psychologist Dr. Robert Cross, a world-renowned expert in the field of mental health, gave a lecture at Dogs For Life about suicide risk assessment. Dr. Cross served during WWII (1945-1946) on board the US Navy carrier USS Palau (CVE-122). After the war, he was discharged from the Navy and took employment with a mental hospital for veterans. It was here that he developed a deep empathy for the mental suffering and anguish that veterans experience. Determined to help correct these issues, he enrolled at the University of Chicago where he received his bachelor's degree. He went on to earn two master's degrees and a PhD. His love for helping people overcome their adversities has been the foundation for his service to others.

Dr. Cross' lecture was very informative and provided valuable knowledge about a difficult subject matter (suicide) that most don't want to speak about. Dogs For Life looks forward to having Dr. Cross speak again.

# ACVO Offers Free Eye Exams

*By Beth Stryker and Hearing Dog Grady*

The ACVO/Epicur National Service Animal Eye Exam is a philanthropic event that provides complimentary eye screenings to qualified service & working animals. Grady and I attended the event in 2022 and highly recommend this free eye exam to all service dog teams. In fact, we have already signed up for the 2023 event!



*Beth Stryker and Grady*

The eye exams are provided by members of the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists who choose to participate and volunteer their time and resources. Approximately 76,000 animals have received these free screenings over the past thirteen years.

We chose Dr. Carmen Colitz (DVM, PhD, DACVO, MBA) at Jupiter Pet Emergency & Specialty Center. Dr. Colitz is Board Certified in Ophthalmology. She is originally from North Miami, Florida, did most of her undergraduate work at UF, and then earned her DVM and Ph.D. in Comparative and Experimental Medicine from the University of Tennessee. She became a board-certified veterinary ophthalmologist in 1999.

The 2022 eye exam was Grady's first. Even though Grady was



only 18 months old at the time, poodles can have many eye issues. I was relieved to have this unique opportunity for him to have a free eye exam thanks to DFL and ACVO.

It was easy to schedule the appointment because all that was necessary was to register online at [www.acvoeyexam.org](http://www.acvoeyexam.org) and give Grady's registration number to the receptionist when we arrived. However, I had to call well in advance!

Dr. Colitz and staff were very professional and could not have been nicer. We were happy to find out Grady's eyesight is normal.

Registration for the ACVO/Epicur National Service Animal Eye Exam Event is open annually, from April 1st - 30th.



*Dr. Colitz examines a dog at her office in Jupiter, FL*

# PTSD Support Groups

**Dogs For Life, 1230 16th Avenue, Vero Beach, is the location of two support groups for veterans and first responders dealing with PTSD.**

## The Veteran PTSD Support Group

Meets at 7:00 PM  
Mondays and Thursdays

Peer leader: Chuck Gerrald, USA

Facilitators: Kris Hasenauer, USA, PA-C,  
Thomas R. Metzinger, USMC, LCSW, Therapist  
and  
Michael Wright, USA (Ret.), RCSWI/MCAP

## The Female Veterans and First Responders Support Group

Meets at 7:00 PM  
First, third and fifth  
Wednesday of each month

Peer leader: Ingrid Hernandez, USA

Facilitator: Paula Robinson, USA, RMHCI



## In Memory of Sherrie Davidson

We lost a beloved member of our Dogs For Life family when Sherrilyn “Sherrie” Tatham Davidson passed away on January 19, 2023.

Sherrie and her husband Donald joined the DFL Dog Park in 2007. At the time, they had pups Oliver and Isabelle. After Isabelle, Oliver, and Don passed, Sherrie acquired a new pup named Lulu. Sherrie and Lulu remained dog park members until Sherrie’s passing.

Active in civic and cultural organizations in both Vero Beach and Lake Forest, Illinois, Sherrie is remembered for her kind heart, generous spirit, and loving soul. She greatly enjoyed coming to the dog park and regularly made donations to support park maintenance. She also

generously supported DFL’s service dog training program.

Sherrie’s family designated DFL among the organizations to receive donations in her memory. “We are extremely grateful to Sherrie’s family for thinking of DFL at this difficult time. Sherrie was very personable, and I’ll truly miss her stories about Lulu’s cute antics,” said Shelly Ferger. Dogs For Life has permanently posted a donor bone in Sherrie’s memory on the memorial lattice at DFL.



# Tributes and Memorial Gifts

In Memory  
of  
Robert G. Bowman  
And Robbie

Our Dogs Leave  
Paw Print Memories  
In Our  
Hearts Forever

## In Honor Of

**Arleen Arsenault Birthday**  
Linda Barberi  
Shelly Ferger

**Linda Barberi**  
John and Janet Ficara  
Elisa and Matt Marra  
Margaret Parker

**Brenda Daniels Birthday**  
Shelly Ferger

**Sally Dunn Birthday**  
Linda Barberi  
Shelly Ferger

**Roxanna Hinzman**  
Colleagues at the US Fish  
and Wildlife Service

**Cheryl Marshall**  
Edward Kropp

**Ann Nolan Birthday**  
Linda Barberi  
Shelly Ferger

**Kathi G. Schumann**  
Mark and Cheri Schumann  
John and Kim Schumann  
Gene and Martha Schumann

**Henrietta Sullivan**  
Phi Beta Psi Sorority

## In Memory Of

**Bella**  
Pam Brady

## Eleanor Bengyak

Linda Barberi  
Laura Bonney  
Beth Bybee  
Marilyn Cance  
Ellie Clinton  
Steve Defren  
Martin and Marge Desmery  
Dillon Family Fund -  
Ann Dillon  
Richard & Cathleen Donner  
Mim Dunn  
Shelly Ferger  
Cynthia Guyer  
Stephanie Hurtt  
Laurie Iodice  
Christopher Kratt  
Patricia McCalister  
Donald & Heather Roberts  
Eleanor Sexton  
Judy Zern

**Frank Casiglia**  
Mary Malenfant  
Lori Yoselow

**Chere McCoy**  
Nathalie Arribas

## Mitzi Clinton

Shelly Ferger  
Beth Stryker

## Joe Critelli

Patricia McCalister

## Sherrie Davidson

Ann Brightman  
Dorothy Chaffee  
Marion Christoph  
Fran Devitt  
Claire Evans  
Shelly Ferger  
Beverly Fetzer  
John Fix  
Marcia and Charles Foreman  
Ann Hamner  
Kristen and Jack Jolly  
Walter and Joan Kasten II  
Francie Kirkpatrick  
Langdon Mannion  
Katharine Merriman  
James Miller  
Richard and Jill Murphy  
Tom Slaughter  
Carolyn Starmann  
Karri Taylor  
The Gillette Foundation -  
Karla A. Gillette  
Gullquist/Mullin Family  
Foundation -  
Herbert & Anne Gullquist

## Karen Truettner

Maria Vocke  
Jonathan and Cheryl Ward

## Robert George Herlich

Glenn Herlich

## Daisy Greenwood

Patti Schell Pet Sitting

## Karen A. Hansen

Don and Meg Peterson

## Sgt Mike A. Lopez

Aglaee Nicholas

## Milo

Rachel Rice

## Louis Miraglia

Chris Consi

## Joseph Mower Sr.

Kiskatom Volunteer  
Fire Department

## Walter and Donna Kunst

Yvette Route

## Cynthia Quinn

Linda Barberi

## Ryan Scott

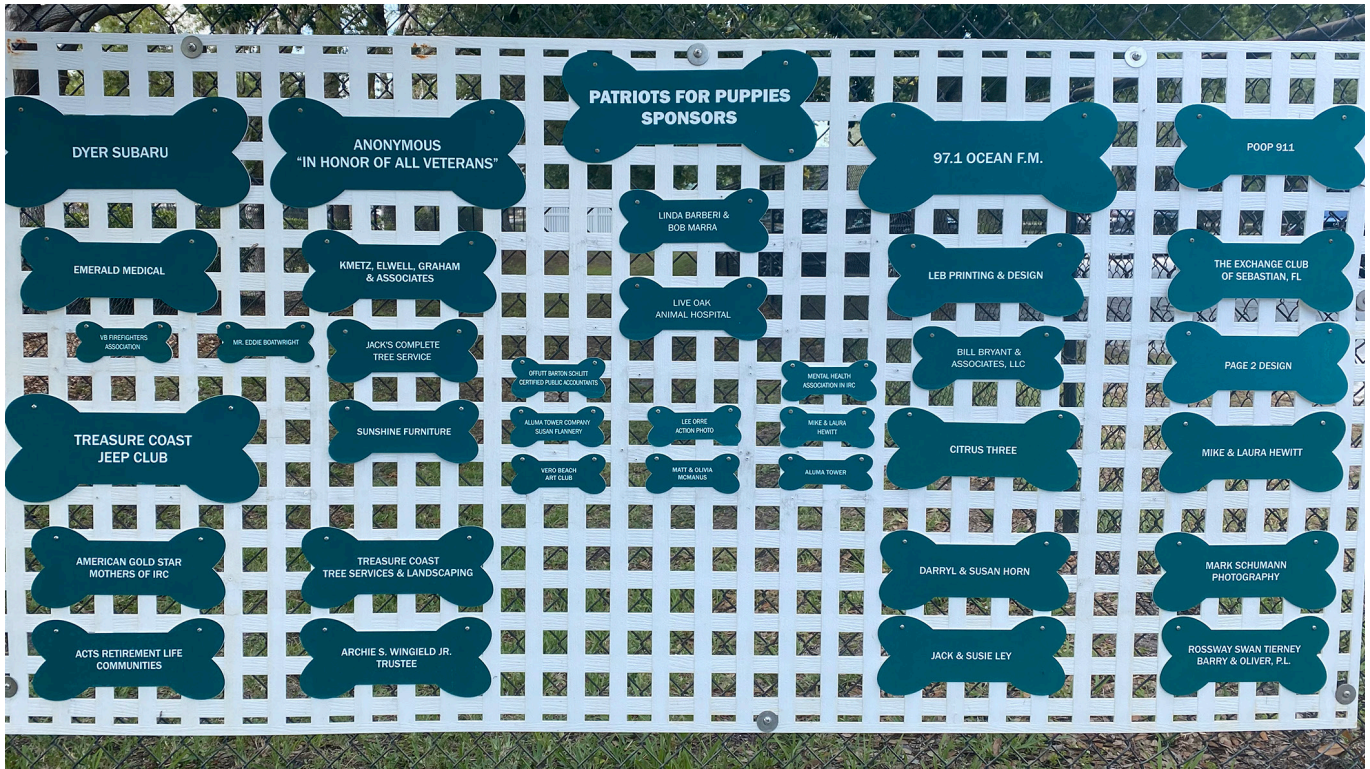
Patrick and Laura Hopkins

*Military Themed Golden Oldies Dance & Show*



**Patriots For Puppies**

Sponsor this Military-themed Golden Oldies Dance and Show and have your business recognized at the front entrance of Dogs For Life on a donor bone for 1 year!



For additional information contact Shelly Ferger, Founder and CEO  
office@dogsforlifevb.org • 772-567-8969 • www.dogsforlifevb.org

