

SOUTHEASTERN GUIDE DOGS NEWS

Impact

SPRING 2020

★
VETERANS
EDITION



Heroic Lives

A DOG FROM OUT OF THE BLUE
THE FACE THAT SAVED MY LIFE
HEROES, HONORS, AND HOLLYWOOD

 Southeastern
GUIDE DOGS

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Heroic Lives



from the CEO

Dear Friends,

What do you think of when you hear the word “hero”?

Someone who shows courage during a crisis? A champion? A veteran who served in the U.S. Armed Forces?

Yes. To all of those.

Here at Southeastern Guide Dogs, we understand that heroes come in all flavors. Heroes like the veteran who struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder and can't deal with crowds, but gets on a crowded plane to come to us for a service dog. Heroes like the grandmother with vision loss who travels across the country to visit her grandchildren, with the help of her guide dog. And heroes like our dogs—our remarkable, four-legged superheroes—who save the day, every day, for the people who love them.

And like you. Generous, heroic you.

You make it all possible. You bring our mission to life and stand with us as we create these extraordinary partnerships between people and dogs. Thank you for being a hero for our heroes.

Warm regards,

Titus Herman
Chief Executive Officer



BE A HERO FOR OUR HEROES

OUT OF THE Blue

BOB MACPHERSON & SERVICE DOG BLUE

After 30 years in the Marines and a career as the head of a humanitarian assistance company working in countries from Bosnia to Syria, Bob Macpherson lives with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Before receiving his service dog BeJay, nicknamed "Blue," Bob's fear of exposing his vulnerability plus a sense of shame and survivor's guilt made him reluctant to ask for help. But he pressed on, and now he's found peace through his beautiful dog. The following is shared with permission from Bob's blog, A Quiet Journey (QuietJourney.net).

to relax. I've had morphine in the past, and this is the same sensation. Peace flows through my body. His paw is on my left hand. His head is laying gently across my chest. I shut my eyes and feel the rhythm of his heartbeat, slow and gentle. I begin to match it with my breathing. It is comforting. *It's going to be ok.*

Blue turned three years old today. He has been with me for ten months. We talk about a "game changer" in life. We've all had them. Some

good...some bad, but they're part of being alive. In Blue's case, the term, "game changer" is trite.

He isn't a changer. He is *the* changer. He is my PTSD service dog.

There, I wrote it—out loud. PTSD. I have post-traumatic stress disorder. It's an admission, and I'm not happy about it. In fact, it embarrasses me. ▶

I'm asleep and suddenly awake. For a moment, I wonder, *where am I?* I stare

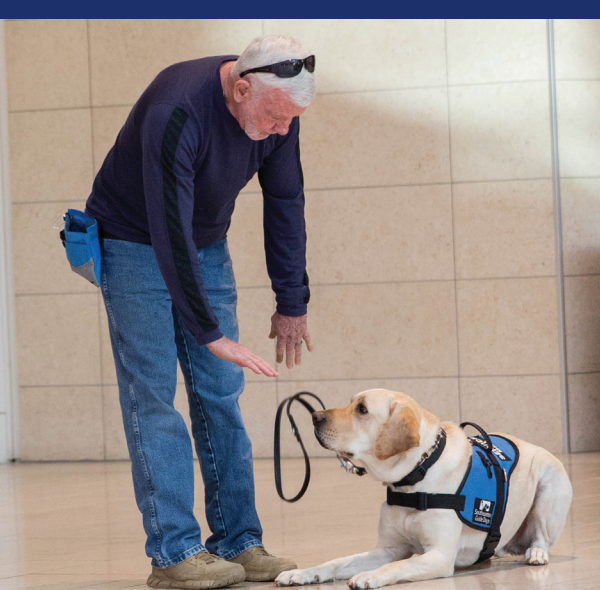
at the ceiling fan. It is the one in my bedroom. I am sweating. *How bad is it?* I'm panting. The sheets are soaked. My wife is still asleep. I must not be shouting. *What is it this time?*

I don't want to remember, but it is still there.

The genocide in Rwanda.

I feel him. He woke me. My breathing quiets; I begin





I WAS TAUGHT FROM BIRTH, WEAKNESS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE. NEVER CRY. IF YOU ARE PUSHED, PUSH BACK HARDER. IF YOU ARE HURT, ENDURE IT. EMOTIONS ARE WEAK; STOICISM IS STRENGTH. NEVER QUIT. BUT IF YOU DO—DON'T COME HOME.

It worked in the beginning. It worked in Vietnam, Beirut, Desert Storm, Somalia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Congo, Kosovo, Jenin, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

It worked until it didn't.

And then, this big, floppy-eared, clumsy, gentle, soulful, kind, and magnificent dog came into my life. He arrived from "out of the blue." He was trained for two years as a service dog at Southeastern Guide Dogs. Their tag line reads, "Serving those who cannot see and those who have seen too much." They offer their services and dogs at no cost.

Blue returned my ability to interact with people in crowds, church, gym, restaurants, lectures, concerts, and work. I didn't realize how reclusive I had become until he arrived. Those are the benefits. The tough side is the realization, that I'm better. My PTSD will never be cured, but "better" is OK. Life is good. It's a slogan, but the truth.

As I attempted to unravel my diagnosis, I wandered down a number of inevitable paths. Why me? How did this happen? What did I experience to cause it? Do I really have this problem or am I weak? I know so many others who have seen and experienced worse, and they seem okay. Why me?

Today, I realize . . . *it is what it is.*

I cannot change the past, but I can change my attitude. The biggest advantage I have is lying next to me as I write. He is 90 pounds of pure love and unabashed loyalty. He lives in a constant state of joy. He's happy, funny, and true. He's devoted to the point that I honor his presence.

As I age, I find I spend more time thinking about being grateful. There is too much fear and anger surrounding us. It seems like it is taking over. However, it is worth stepping back and looking at the greater picture. How did the obscure and seemingly unrelated circumstances come together for Blue to arrive? Southeastern Guide Dogs trains hundreds of dogs; why was I paired with him?

We are a perfect match. It can't be happenstance. He was a bolt from the Blue that changed everything. I realize there is something at work here that is far greater than me, and I am forever grateful to Southeastern Guide Dogs. ●



CHANNELING GRIEF THROUGH Service

ANNETTE KIRK & GOLD STAR FAMILY DOG BRUNO

More than 2,400 American troops have died over the last two decades in the War in Afghanistan. Each of these sons and daughters has a mom who now bears the uninvited title: Gold Star Mother.

Army veteran Annette Kirk became a Gold Star Mother after losing her son, PFC Paul O. Cuzzupe II. Paul was killed in action on August 8, 2010 in Akhtar-Mohammad-Khan, Afghanistan, of wounds sustained when insurgents attacked his unit with an improvised explosive device.

When it comes to working through her personal grief, Annette is aided by a special gift from Southeastern Guide Dogs, her Gold Star Family dog, Bruno. He helps her as she serves veterans and their families through volunteerism, patriotism, and human empathy.

"As Gold Star Mothers, we will volunteer with almost any veteran service organization," Annette says. "Our sons and daughters may have died, but veterans have served us—and we continue the service of our sons and daughters within our community."

Bruno serves alongside Annette as an unofficial therapy dog. When she meets with a grieving mother or visits veterans, Bruno shares his warmth and lifts spirits, and he's always there for Annette. "He's made a difference," she says. "I feel happier—I think because he's so happy, he makes me happy. He has such a personality! I'm not a touchy-feely person, but with Bruno I am. I hug on him a lot and he's always next to me."

In recognition of Annette's tireless volunteer leadership as the state president of the American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. (Department of Florida/Puerto Rico), her volunteer service to countless veteran's organizations, and her one-on-one support to grieving mothers, Annette was recently named a Tampa Bay Lightning Community Hero. She received a \$50,000 award to donate to the charity of her choice, and Southeastern Guide Dogs is grateful for her generosity. ●



“Our sons and daughters may have died, but veterans have served us—and we continue the service of our sons and daughters within our community.”



from the
chairman of
the board

Dear Friends,

In my late twenties, I worked on a family farm near Tallahassee, Florida, growing row crops and raising cattle. In farming—and in life—you quickly learn that you reap what you sow. If you sow peanuts, you never reap corn.

As the Chairman of the Board of Southeastern Guide Dogs, I'm excited to report that you've sown into our school and we are reaping a harvest of innovation and strength. I've worked in the nonprofit world my entire career, and I've never seen a success story like Southeastern Guide Dogs. This organization has transformed from a small house in a cow pasture to a 33-acre campus with a level of excellence that has caught the eye of the entire service dog industry.

And it's all made possible because of you. You invest in our science, genetics, and canine fitness, enabling us to develop healthier, smarter, stronger dogs. You invest in our infrastructure, and we're creating a world-class training environment. You invest in our students and alumni, and we're empowering people with vision loss, veterans with disabilities, and children with significant challenges.

Thank you for sowing your generosity—may you reap the rich rewards of knowing that you're growing a legacy, making an impact, and changing people's lives.

Warm regards,

Raymond W. Bishop
Chairman of the Board

**JOIN ME IN THE WORTHWHILE MISSION OF SERVING
THOSE WHO SERVED. WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU**



GUIDE DOGS

Our guide dogs offer independence and freedom to visually impaired veterans, restoring confidence and dignity. Veterans live and learn on campus for 20 days with help from their new companions. Gone are tentative steps and white canes, replaced by heads held high and brisk paces.



ABOUT OUR VETERANS PROGRAMS

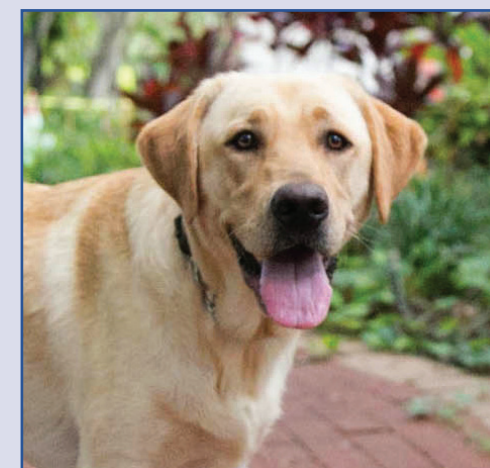


SERVICE DOGS

Our service dogs help veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other disabilities. Providing unconditional love and loyalty, they respond to commands that help restore stability and well-being. After our 11-day class, veterans report powerful stories of reconnecting with family and society once again.

FACILITY THERAPY DOGS

Our facility therapy dogs are hand-picked to live with facility staff members and provide therapeutic comfort to veterans and families being treated in military medical facilities or working in high-stress military environments across the nation.



GOLD STAR FAMILY DOGS

Our Gold Star Family dogs give the gift of comforting friendship. Recognizing the sacrifices made when a family member dies in service to the nation, Southeastern Guide Dogs offers well-behaved, loving companion dogs to Gold Star families in need.



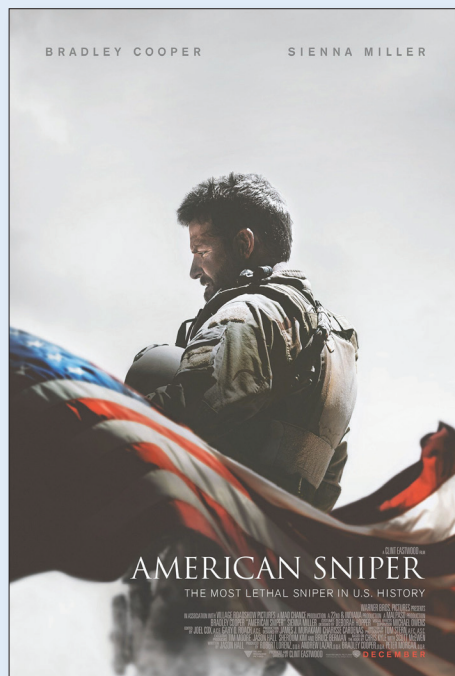
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT DOGS

Our skilled emotional support dogs benefit veterans, offering therapeutic companionship and helping to restore a more active lifestyle. These affectionate dogs improve veterans' physical, social, and emotional well-being and are provided at the recommendation of a medical professional.

CINEMA and Superheroes



Many American heroes work to bring hope to veterans living with traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other disabilities. Three in particular have something in common: they've risen to celebrity status through action movies based on real-life scenarios, and they rely on beautiful dogs from Southeastern Guide Dogs.



Taya Kyle, the widow of *American Sniper* Chris Kyle and a survivor of the anxiety, depression, and stress brought on by her husband's very public assassination, lives with a loving emotional support dog named Norman.

 **American Sniper** (2014)

Navy SEAL sniper Chris Kyle's (Bradley Cooper's) pinpoint accuracy saves countless lives on the battlefield and turns him into a legend. Back home to his wife and kids after four tours of duty, however, Chris finds that it is the war he can't leave behind. (IMDB)



Marcus Luttrell, the renowned former Navy SEAL known as the hero of the movie *Lone Survivor*, navigates the world of PTSD and emotional trauma with the help of his service dog, Mr. Rigby.

 **Lone Survivor** (2013)


Marcus Luttrell (Mark Wahlberg) and his team set out on a mission to capture or kill notorious Taliban leader Ahmad Shah, in late June 2005. Marcus and his team are left to fight for their lives in one of the most valiant efforts of modern warfare. (IMDB)



Keni Thomas shares his experience in one of history's most notorious military gunfights, portrayed in the movie *Black Hawk Down*. Thanks to a devoted service dog named Keith, Keni manages his own PTSD while fulfilling his mission to offer healing advice to veterans with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities.

 **Black Hawk Down** (2001)

One-hundred-sixty elite U.S. soldiers drop into Somalia to capture two top lieutenants of a renegade warlord and find themselves in a desperate battle with a large force of heavily-armed Somalis. (IMDB)

 While it's fascinating to hear how our dogs impact these celebrity heroes, it's compelling to see how our dogs will pour out the same unconditional love, whether for an admiral, general, or newly recruited seaman, soldier, airman, or Marine. Our dogs ignore rank and celebrity in favor of *semper fi*, always faithful. ●

THE FACE THAT Saved My Life

MORGAN WATT & SERVICE DOG FOLEY

It is October 12th, 2013. It's 8 o'clock at night, I am lying on my unmade bed, and I haven't showered in three days. I stare at the stack of empty beer cans on my nightstand. I am self-medicating with alcohol and prescription drugs to add to my already numb emotional state.

I've just lost my job as an airline captain of 17 years due to a chronic migraine and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I am in physical and emotional pain, but I cannot tell the difference. I am in the hellish depths of depression.

As I'm lying in my bed, I'm thinking, what would the world be like without me? Would I be missed? My loaded Beretta 9mm handgun is in my safe just a few feet away. It feels like it's calling to me, and it would be painless just to end it all—right here, right now.

It's time. I stand up and walk into the closet where the safe is. My wife, Amber, walks in and she stops right between me and the safe. We don't say a word to each other, but somehow, she knows . . . she knows what I'm thinking,



and she won't let me past her. I'm sure she can see it in my eyes: I'm already gone. My decision has been made. But tonight, Amber is the one person who can stop me. I'm not going to fight her for it, so for now, it's over. I go back to bed and pass out.

I've lost all hope. My career is over. My full-time job is nothing but doctors' appointments and therapy sessions. My wife goes to work each day and my kids go off to school, leaving me alone to deal with chronic migraines, depression, and PTSD.

PTSD makes me feel like the

lights have gone out, and I will never experience peace again.

Now it is January 15, 2015, the day that will change everything. I am given the gift of Foley, a calm and relaxed yellow goldador and my new service dog. Things begin to shift.

My counselor has been trying to get me to slow down, to be mindful of every step. "We are not in a hurry," says Foley. He's like an anti-anxiety pill; he is so grounding that he just looks at me and forces me to be present. Foley takes the focus off of myself, off of my pain. His tail wags constantly and his entire body tells me, "everything's okay."

Foley is my moment-by-moment medication. I can reach down and rub his ears or give him a hug. He creates space and gives me an excuse to take a deep breath. My three years of feeling suicidal are over.

Foley becomes the center of my support network—24/7. He fills the gap between therapy and medication. He also does something amazing that I could not possibly have asked for. Within a week, I train him to

retrieve my migraine medication. It's a game we play, where I ask Foley to "get the bag." In the sealed bag is my medication, along with his toy moose. I get my medication, Foley gets his moose, and everybody's happy.

Within a few short months, Foley begins responding to my migraines about 45 minutes before I get one. He comes to me, licks me very aggressively, and whines. At first, I don't know what he's telling me, and I ignore him. Then off to the emergency room I go. But once I figure out that Foley senses my migraine before I do, it changes my life. Taking this medication ahead of time can abort the whole painful process, which now gives me the freedom to go about my day without worrying that I will end up in the hospital. Because of Foley, I go out with confidence, knowing that I won't be stuck out somewhere with a crippling disability. My dog gives me back my freedom and independence.

Now I look back to that dark October night, and then I look into the face that always makes me smile, the face that saved my life. I look into Foley's eyes and I know: everything's okay.

Air Force veteran Morgan Watt served during the Persian Gulf era as a security police first responder, a K-9 handler trained in explosive detection, and with the Secret Service on presidential detail. He worked as a civilian pilot until chronic pain and PTSD grounded him from flying. With the help of his service dog, Foley, Morgan now focuses on post-traumatic growth, and shares his message of hope with other veterans at morganwatt.com

“PTSD makes me feel like the lights have gone out, and I will never experience peace again.”



A SALUTE TO Service

BOBBY NEWMAN, Southeastern Guide



Dogs lifetime board member, was honored with the Distinguished Citizen Award at the National Medal of Honor Convention, held recently in Tampa, Florida. Bobby received the honor for his work with Southeastern Guide Dogs on behalf of veterans.

Bobby's leadership in co-founding our veterans' programs, longtime service on our board, and ongoing financial support plays a key role in our ability to place hundreds of guide dogs, service dogs, facility therapy dogs, emotional support dogs, and Gold Star Family dogs throughout the United States.



The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration awarded by the president of the United States to military service members, recognizing "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity involving risk of life above and beyond the call of duty." The Distinguished Citizen Award is presented to civilians who have distinguished themselves as Americans dedicated to freedom and the ideals represented by the Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

We're proud of Bobby's award and thankful for his many years of service to Southeastern Guide Dogs and to veterans. ●





HERITAGE
SOCIETY



Where There's a Will, There's a Way

Most American adults believe that having a will is important, yet most do not have one. According to a recent survey, only 4 out of 10 American adults have established a will or trust. As people age, those numbers improve, and 58% of baby boomers do have estate planning documents.

Now, it's easier than ever to create a will. Through our partnership with Freewill, Southeastern Guide Dogs offers a free online tool to write a legally valid will, at no cost.

Remembering Southeastern Guide Dogs in your will creates a legacy of kindness, and gifts of any size impact our mission, our extraordinary dogs, and the people we serve. Visit GuideDogs.org/will to access this convenient tool.

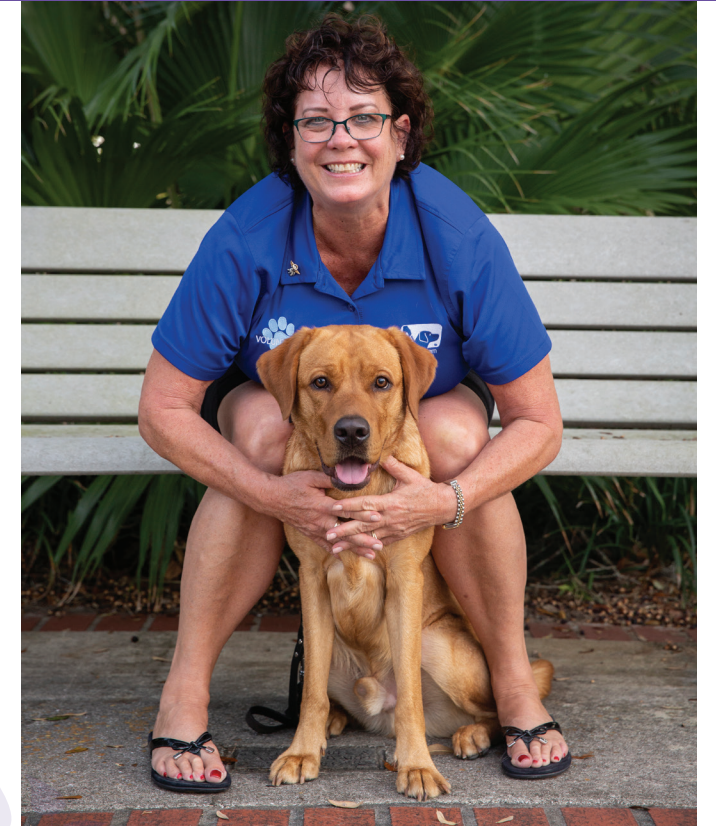
For those who include Southeastern Guide Dogs in wills and bequests, we offer membership in our Heritage Society. This community of generous people support our mission in the future through planned giving. To find out how you can create a lasting legacy through the Heritage Society, visit GuideDogs.org/HS.



HERITAGE
SOCIETY

Keeping the Legacy Alive

HARRIET JORDAN &
THE HERITAGE SOCIETY



Harriet Jordan wears a Labrador guardian angel pin on her Southeastern Guide Dogs volunteer shirt. Given to her when one of her beloved dogs passed away, Harriet knows the healing comfort of a four-legged companion. Soon after her dog died, she spotted a lost black Labrador. It was her neighbor's dog, a well-known "escape artist." Overwhelmed, her neighbor offered Harriet the dog, and Jack the black Lab found a new home. Just two months later, Harriet's husband, Sam Closkey, unexpectedly passed away.

"Jack is my angel," Harriet shares. "He helped me get through a lot." Jack showed up when Harriet needed him most, and now Harriet pays it forward. Since Sam's passing, she's logged more than 1,000 volunteer hours and continues to support the Harley golf tournament her husband started to benefit our veterans' programs.

"When my husband was alive, we always had Southeastern Guide Dogs in our wills," Harriet says. "We wanted to make sure that if we had any money left it would go to something we both believed in." She's officially joined our Heritage Society, a group

of caring individuals that support our school through wills and bequests.

Harriet believes in the mission of Southeastern Guide Dogs, and veterans are especially close to her heart. Sam was a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel and a Vietnam veteran.

One day while Harriet was volunteering at our front desk, a veteran named Jack stopped by. Jack was thinking about applying for a service dog, but after arriving, it took him two hours to gather his courage before coming inside. He changed his mind and turned to leave, but Harriet encouraged Jack to stay. She immediately introduced him to a fellow veteran, staff member Sean Brown and his service dog, Pella.

Soon after the visit, Jack applied to our school and recently received his service dog, Gladdy. This laid-back, loving dog has already changed Jack's life.

"I've seen first-hand how our dogs impact veterans like Jack, and it makes my heart full," Harriet says. "I'm thinking that Sam must be so proud of me for keeping his legacy alive." ●



“Irwin brightens everyone’s day. I can’t say enough about him; he’s blown my mind.”

A COMMISSION OF Hope

TIM BEDFORD & FACILITY THERAPY DOG IRWIN MILITARY RESILIENCE PROGRAM

When military members cope with stressing issues such as deployment, combat action, military sexual trauma and re integration, their psychological wellness can be compromised. Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse problems can result, and inpatient treatment can be a lifesaver. A warm hug from a friendly dog can help, too.

Now, a sweet yellow Labrador named Irwin is making his rounds and sharing his therapeutic love at the inpatient Military Resilience Program of the Emerald Coast Behavioral Hospital in Panama City, Florida. Its mission is to provide exceptional behavioral health services to United States service members in need, and CEO Tim Bedford knew that a facility therapy dog could help not only with patients, but with staff, too.

After the devastation of Hurricane Michael in October 2018, nearly half of the hospital staff still live in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailers parked in their driveways or FEMA camps. “Our hospital was closed for six months, and our staff are still rebuilding their homes,” says Tim. “It’s difficult.” So, when the hospital welcomed Irwin into their ranks, he quickly became a turning point. “Irwin brightens everyone’s day,” he says. “I can’t say enough about him; he’s blown my mind.”



“The service members love, love, love Irwin,” Tim continues. “You can see it in their faces how much he helps them.” And when veterans are discharged from the hospital, Irwin is the face they want to see before they leave many letting him know that they love him.

For one particular veteran recovering in the unit, Irwin brought an instant dose of hope. Shaking and crying, the service member pet Irwin until his tears dissolved into peaceful relief. This scenario plays out repeatedly as Irwin touches lives every day. “It

warms my heart to see the veterans respond to Irwin,” Tim says. “I wish we had a herd of Irwins.”

Tim’s Marine Corps dad, Marvin Bedford, passed away six years ago. This WWII veteran and Purple Heart recipient left Tim with a “commission.” “Right before he died, my dad said, ‘Whatever you can do for active duty and veterans, please do,’” Tim says, his voice shaking. “He blessed me and made sure I’m not rudderless. And I think he’d absolutely love what Irwin is doing for the veterans.” ●



THE HEROES CHALLENGE:

MAXIMIZE YOUR Generosity

Your generosity changes lives. And now, you can leverage your kindness into greater good, because your gift will go twice as far. A caring group of friends have pooled their resources together to create our Heroes Challenge. Our Heroes Council will match your gift—up to \$350,000—with all proceeds supporting the extraordinary dogs that make a difference for veterans and for people with vision loss.

Now is the perfect time to maximize your generosity! All designated donations made before July 31, 2020 will qualify for matching funds.

Don't wait! Give your most meaningful gift today and multiply your impact.

P.S. Double your donation! All designated donations made before July 31, 2020 will qualify for matching funds.

Now is the time to leverage your generosity! Donate today at [GuideDogs.org/challenge](https://www.guidedogs.org/challenge)



DOUBLE YOUR DONATION TODAY

INTRODUCING THE HEROES Council

Dear Friends,

We've heard these words and said them many times: "Thank you for your service." But when it comes to truly thanking veterans for the sacrifices they've made—to borrow a military phrase—we wanted to put boots on the ground in showing our appreciation.

We are the Heroes Council, a group of individuals who have come together to take action in support of the veterans' programs of Southeastern Guide Dogs. We've each committed a minimum of \$25,000 to create a Heroes Challenge grant of \$350,000 that we're offering to Southeastern Guide Dogs. With this grant, we plan to match all donations dollar-for-dollar, up to \$350,000, which means that you can double your donation with each gift.

Every gift will directly support the extraordinary partnerships between veterans and their elite dogs, and we're proud to be part of this life-changing mission. Please join us, and let's show veterans how much we really care.

Warmly,

The Heroes Council

Heroes Council Members

- Jim Barge & Dawn McKnight
- Bob Basham
- Warren & Kate Coopersmith
- E. Liberty Foundation
- Nancy & Bill Gacioch
- Marcia Gosline
- George & Mary Graner
- The Sam M. Scituro Family Foundation
- Lester & Diana Shapiro
- Brian & Sherry Soucy

All donations are tax deductible as allowed by law. A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Division of Consumer Services by calling toll free 1.800.435.7352 within the state. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the state. Registration number CH0475.



We're proud to support Southeastern Guide Dogs

At Fromm Family Foods, we pride ourselves on offering a wide variety of premium dog and cat foods produced using the finest ingredients. Countless families across the country trust us with feeding their four-legged family members. We are honored to be selected as the Official Dog Food of Southeastern Guide Dogs, providing nutritional excellence to their extraordinary dogs throughout the United States.



To find a retailer near you, visit frommfamily.com/retailers