



HEALING

INVISIBLE WOUNDS

Murphy Meets the Doctor

Hooch the Lifesaver

Heroes for Heroes

New! Scent Detection Dogs

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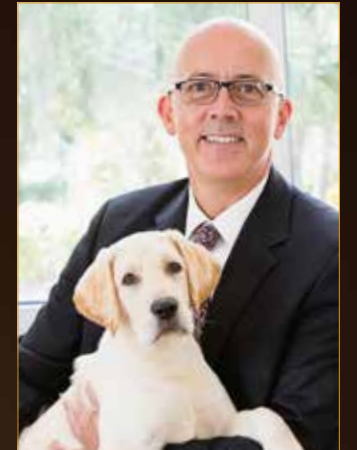
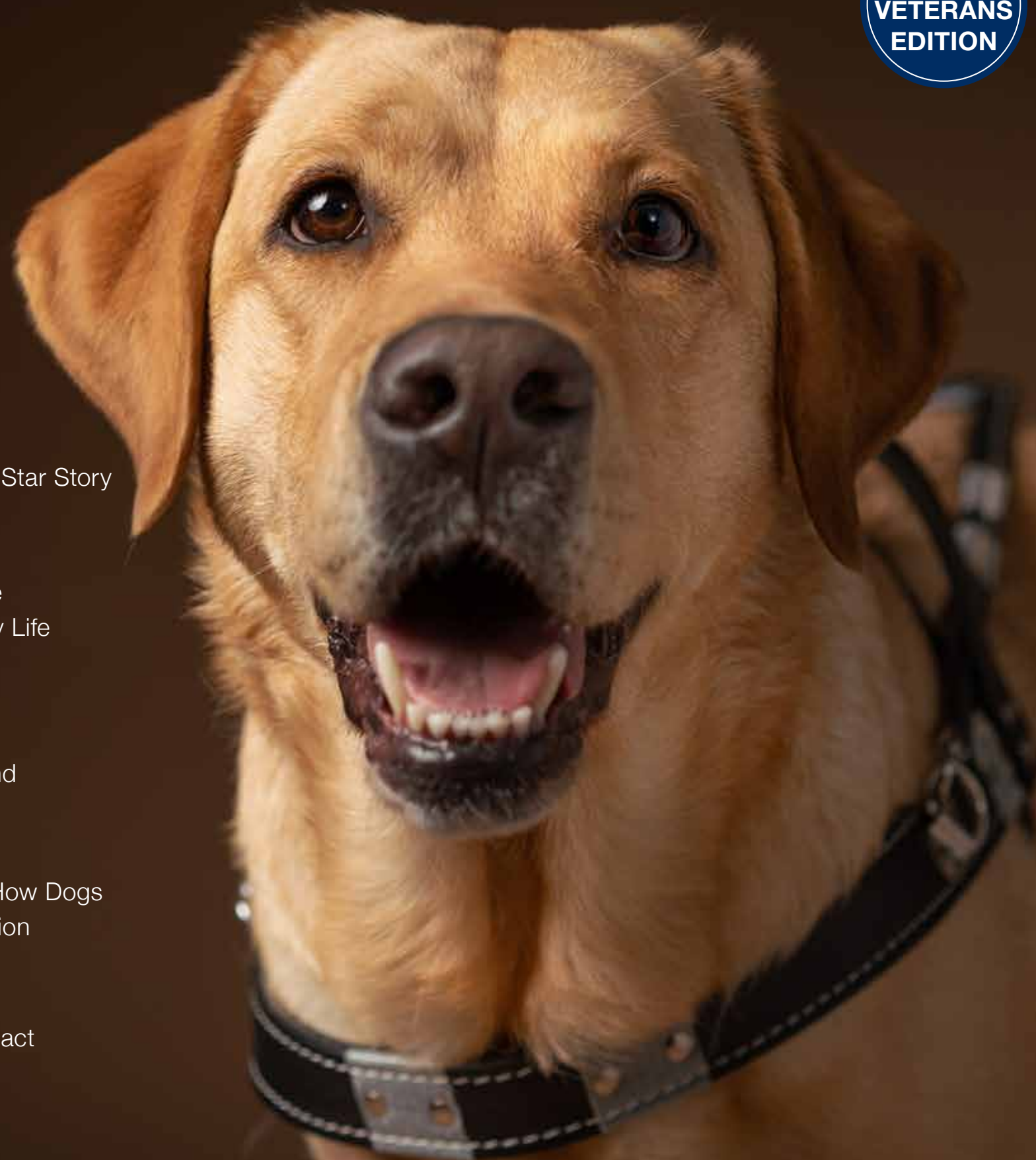
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Dear Friends,

About ten years ago, I was watching the news and saw on the screen one of our facility therapy dogs, a black Lab named Bruce. He was comforting patients at the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center, and one wounded veteran said, *"This isn't a dog this is an angel with four paws."*

It's true. And I've never forgotten the look on that veteran's face.

Our dogs bring so much to each partnership. Unconditional love. Unquestioning loyalty. Unbelievable intelligence, training, and skills. Our dogs are the happiest dogs around when matched with their very best friends, but that's not all.

After all these years of pairing hundreds of veterans with our extraordinary dogs, I still pinch myself every time I see the astonishing transformations that take place in the lives of the people we're privileged to serve. And I know this to be true: because of you, our dogs make miracles happen.

Thank you.

Titus Herman
Chief Executive Officer



from our chairman of the board

Dear Friends,

One fateful day in 2013, I glanced out my office window at Doctors Hospital of Sarasota and saw a volunteer shuttle driver with the cutest ride-along friend: a small black Lab wearing a little blue coat. A dog lover since childhood, I had to find out more.

That was the day I met Tangerine, a Southeastern Guide Dogs puppy-in-training, and Dennis and Dorothea Quinn, now eight-time puppy raisers. And that's how I learned about Southeastern Guide Dogs, an organization that I'm thrilled to now serve as a volunteer and donor.

As I begin my tenure as board chair, I'm committed to assist in every way that I can. Whether networking and fundraising in pursuit of our mission, educating others about our work, or providing leadership to our dedicated board of directors, please know that I love every minute I spend with the dogs and people of Southeastern Guide Dogs.

I speak for the entire board when I share our appreciation that you—the Southeastern Guide Dogs community—have chosen to support this worthwhile organization. With your ongoing help, these magnificent dogs will continue to make life so much better for people with vision loss, veterans, and children. Thank you for your kindness.

Warm regards

Bob Meade
Board Chair, Southeastern Guide Dogs
Chief Executive Officer, Doctors Hospital of Sarasota

Life UNLEASHED MAGAZINE

A publication of
Southeastern Guide Dogs

Southeastern Guide Dogs transforms lives by creating and nurturing extraordinary partnerships between people and dogs. With over 1,200 dogs under our auspices, we train dogs of the highest pedigree for people with vision loss, veterans with disabilities, and children with significant challenges. Pursuing our mission since 1982, **we provide our premier dogs and lifetime services at no cost.**

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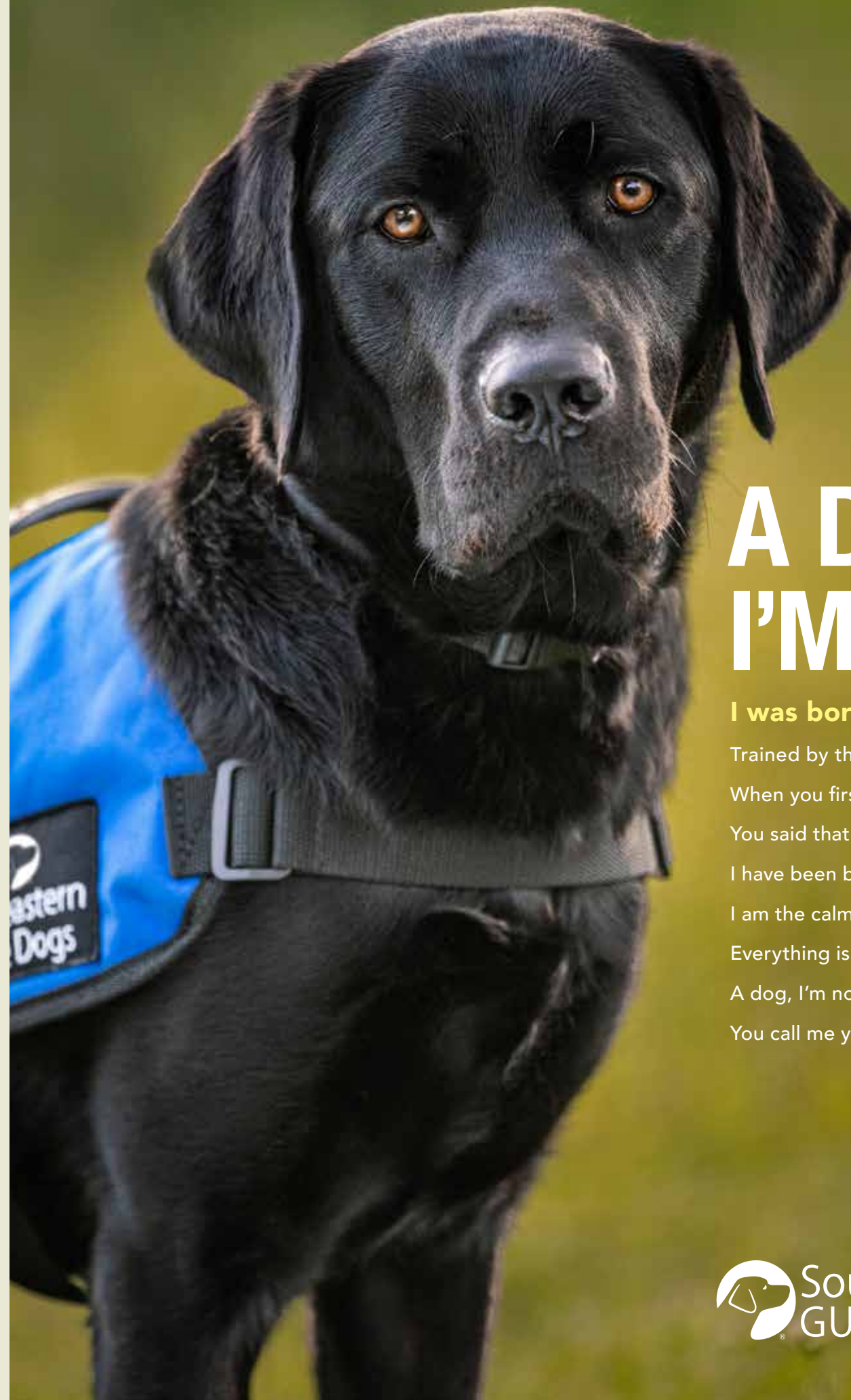
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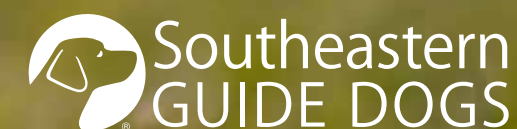
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A DPAWOG, I'M NOT.

I was born one-of-a-kind.

Trained by the best to be the best.
When you first looked into my face,
You said that I saved you.
I have been by your side ever since.
I am the calm when
Everything is screaming.
A dog, I'm not.
You call me your hero.





**Dr. Jeff Ayers and
Service Dog Murphy**



GETTING WELL *with* MURPHY

“You’ll never make it into medical school.”

THOSE WORDS FROM A COLLEGE PROFESSOR LIT A DETERMINED FIRE IN A YOUNGER JEFF AYERS. COLLECTING HIS DIPLOMA FROM THE DES MOINES UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE FELT SWEETER FOR IT. AFTERWARD, JEFF COMPLETED A FAMILY MEDICINE RESIDENCY AT THE U.S. NAVAL HOSPITAL, CAMP PENDLETON. THEN TRUE NAVY LIFE BEGAN WHEN HE RECEIVED HIS FIRST ORDERS, AND JEFF AND HIS WIFE, JULIE, EMBARKED FOR A SMALL NAVAL BASE ON THE ISLAND OF KYUSHU, NORTHWEST OF NAGASAKI, JAPAN.



“I kept thinking, ‘I’m fine—I’m not that bad—there have to be people who need a dog worse than I do.’ I think I was worried, too, about having to explain why I have a dog . . . It’s an obvious sign to people that I’m not whole.”

In the early 1990s, Naval Fleet Activities Sasebo, a small fuel and weapons depot, held a few base houses, a commissary, a movie theater, a simple restaurant, and the clinic where the newly-minted doctor was instructed to never travel farther away than 15 minutes. Jeff and Julie enjoyed on-base housing, while many of the other military families lived off base, “on the economy” in military-speak. In Sasebo, the couple started their family, which later grew to include three sons and a daughter.

Trauma Takes Root

With no real hospital or emergency room on the base, Jeff and his team handled every case. If someone required more care than their facilities could handle, they were medevaced to Tokyo or Okinawa, accompanied by Jeff or one of the other doctors.

And there, on this isolated outpost on the southern tip of Japan, Jeff’s post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) began to dig its gnarled roots into the fertile soil of his caring, kindhearted mind.

Post-traumatic stress revolves around the word *trauma*, and medicine dishes it up with faithful regularity. There were the normal cases of colds, flu, and growing families. There were the injuries and sick children. Worse were the handful of suicides, surrounded by families’ overwhelming grief, and one infamous murder so violent that the Navy seaman victim was beyond recognition. Perhaps the trauma that hit home the hardest was the silent death of a fellow staff member’s child from SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome), which haunted Jeff while his own baby thrived.

Jeff’s determination—the same determination that steered him through medical school—is matched only by his kindness, compassion, and sensitivity. He really, really wants to make people well. And if they don’t get well, he rarely forgets.

Jeff feels the patient’s pain as deeply as if it were his own. And after years of practice, IT ADDS UP.

Highly sensitive people feel more deeply. Unlike some first responders who compartmentalize their jobs—build a mental wall and tuck the trauma into the corners, out of sight, kept at bay by healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms—Jeff absorbs the raw emotions. His rich, inner world retains the tragedies. He feels the patient’s pain as deeply as if it were his own. And after years of practice, it adds up.

“It was challenging and is still, the fact that some people don’t experience negatively the things that I’ve experienced,” he says. “I wondered, what’s wrong with me that I’m so impacted by those things when others are not? For me it was really bad, feeling like I didn’t have what it took to be a physician—certainly not in the Navy.”

Civilian Life

After eight years with the Navy, Jeff embarked on a civilian career. “I thought that civilian life would be easier,” he shares. “But in family medicine, it’s birth-to-death. I was impacted by the death of kids, and even adults—I’d develop relationships with these people; they were close to me. So, it was really hard. I started avoiding things. I scaled back my practice. I stopped seeing kids—I couldn’t handle seeing sick kids. And I don’t ever go to the hospital anymore. I grieve way too long for people that aren’t close to me . . . and certainly way too long for people that are.”

Jeff’s anxiety and stress morphed into further isolation and night terrors. And then, at the recommendation of another veteran, he applied for a service dog from Southeastern Guide Dogs. It took three years of starts-and-stops to finally submit the application.

“I kept thinking, ‘I’m fine—I’m not that bad—there have to be people who need a dog worse than I do.’ I think I was worried, too, about having to explain why I have a dog—and I just didn’t want to go there with people. It’s an obvious sign to people that I’m not whole. So many other veterans have it worse than I did. But I realized, if people are worse than you and they want a dog—they’ll get a dog.” ▶

PUPPY ◀ REWIND



Perfectly Peaceful Murphy

Puppy raisers Jennifer Taylor and Carla Anderson have given years of love and devotion to bringing up 15 dogs between them, so it’s fair to say they are good judges of canine character. Murphy was “lucky number 13,” and Murphy was perfect in every way. “We had a connection. We were peas and carrots,” Jennifer recalls with a burst of emotion. “Murphy knew what I needed him to do. Our communication was perfect. Everything was so easy with him.”

Murphy spent many hours with his raisers in a medical setting. Jennifer is the coordinator for Pet Assisted Wellness Services (PAWS) in Pascagoula, Mississippi, and Murphy hung out with pet therapy professionals, both the human and four-legged varieties. He was the darling of the hospice nurses, and was an empathetic listener who offered endless love and cuddles. “There were times Murphy would select one person and go and sit with them,” shares Jennifer. “Later, I would find out that nurse had lost a patient. He could sense what they needed and gravitated to them.” When Murphy grew up to become a service dog for a physician, he found his perfect destiny.

Murphy is sponsored and named by Colleen Kremer and Colin Murphy to honor and remember their late older brother, Tim Murphy.



Life with Murphy

Speaking of his service dog—meet Murphy, Jeff’s sidekick since June 2019. “He’s funny,” Jeff says simply, his voice brightening at the mere mention of this sweet black Lab with the rapid tail and eager eyes who rarely leaves his side.

“I get ready in the morning, and he’s in the closet. He waits for me, like ‘Dude, take me to work.’ It’s fun to build that routine with him.”

Today Jeff practices medicine in a small corporate clinic, where Murphy feels right at home. “We walk in the door, past security and a receptionist, and Murphy always says hello. When he sees my nurses, he loves them so much he wants to kiss them. All day, he’s my buddy; he sits at my feet, under my desk, napping or asking for a treat.”

As part of his training, Murphy learned about 15 specific skills, including the “Hug” cue, but this pair has forged such a strong bond that Murphy offers a hug whenever he senses Jeff’s anxiety. “He reads me,” Jeff says. “When I’m upset, he sits there and puts his head in my lap. I don’t have to ask for it.”

“People think he’s a therapy dog,” he continues. “When I see patients, I ask, ‘Is it okay that Murphy comes into the room?’ I do a lot of mental health, and I can see the essence of their sadness and anxiety lift—he helps my patients. And at the end of the day, he knows when it’s time to go home. He has all the moves . . . he jumps in a circle as if to say, “Let’s get the heck out of here.”

Since Murphy became his partner, Jeff’s peace of mind has slowly advanced. “Before Murphy, I wasn’t doing much,” he says. “I was hiding—doing the bare minimum. I’d go to church with the family or go to a movie now and then. But internally, it was nerve-wracking. I could hold myself together, like, if I don’t talk about it, it’s okay and I could get by. But there was a lot of anxiety, sadness, terrible dreams, and avoidance. Murphy hasn’t cured everything, but he’s brought a lot of joy and comfort. At the office, he’s so well behaved. When we get home, he’s my puppy. He’s a lap dog; he just wants to sit on my lap. He just wants to be close to me, and he’s very comforting. I don’t have as many



night terrors as I used to, and if I do, he jumps on the bed when that happens.”

Service dogs may not be an instant cure for PTSD. But their advanced skills coupled with their ever-present affection, warmth, faithfulness, silliness, and never-ending love can quickly create a shift—a welcome, almost magical shift—toward joy and hope.

“I thought before, that I’m broken . . . and I don’t want people to know I’m broken,” Jeff says. “With Murphy, I feel less broken.”

To this, the Southeastern Guide Dogs family says, “Thank you, Jeff, for your service and for your vulnerability.” And to Murphy? “Keep up the good work, that’s a good boy!” Together, this team has what it takes to make it. ●

“With
MURPHY,
I feel less
BROKEN.”

FRIENDS, YOUR CARING COMPASSION REACHES VETERANS NATIONWIDE.



Tug of WAR

tug of war
noun

- A contest in which two teams pull at opposite ends of a rope until one drags the other over a central line.
- Cayleigh and her dog Taylor's favorite game.

fate launched a troublesome tug-of-war the day Jillian's husband and Cayleigh's father died on Mother's Day, 2017. On one side came the pull of a normal childhood for Cayleigh, one where she could feel safe and loved. On the other side came the pull of a darkness so deep that mom Jillian wasn't sure her daughter would survive.



*"I don't deserve to live."
"Maybe everyone would be happier if I wasn't here."
"I don't want to make friends."*

Do those kids know that everyone I love leaves, or something happens to everyone that loves me?"

These words seem too strong for an eight-year-old, and they broke her mom's heart when they were whispered through tears, or worse, uttered without emotion as if founded on fact instead of trauma.

Looking Back

U.S. Army Sgt. Terrance Hinton survived two deployments to Kuwait and Afghanistan during the Gulf War, although Afghanistan changed him. "He saw a lot of things he couldn't unsee," Jillian explains. "There were a lot of things he didn't want to talk about."

Then they had baby Cayleigh, growing their small family that included Jillian's teenage son, Christian. "There's something about a soldier and his little girl," Jillian recalls. "Terrance found comfort in her, and when they were together, it was like the place that he got to go that was safe, where nothing was going to hurt him. He could love her and give all of himself without being judged, without anybody looking at him like he was soft. She was his quiet, his love."



PUPPY ◀ REWIND



Taylor-Made for Happiness

From the moment this little goldador arrived in the home of her puppy raisers, Mary and Russell Hillpot, she was a sweetheart who loved to hug and cuddle. After raising 15 pups for Southeastern Guide Dogs, the Hillpots expected Taylor to be smart and learn fast, and she did.

But unique among their other puppies, Taylor was one happy canine—about everything. She was happy to meet people; happy to travel in a car or on a plane; happy to sit patiently and observe the world. She was happy to greet dogs, birds, cats, and people alike. “She was accepting of everything and didn’t chase anything,” Mary says. “She never even bit one of my flowers. I have a lot of plants in the backyard and Taylor liked to go from flower to flower, sniffing them. But she never tried to chew one.”

Taylor’s sweetness and ease made her the perfect pup for delivering lots of happiness to a little girl named Cayleigh, who now showers Taylor with love and receives unconditional love in return.

When Terrance was stationed on Oahu, Hawaii, the tropical beaches, warm sunshine, and aloha pace lulled the family into a most peaceful paradise. A calm before a very, very rough storm.

The Trauma Begins

His 36-year-old husband, father, and soldier was killed instantly while serving as the truck commander in a “lowboy” tractor trailer that teetered off a cliff, crushing him beneath it. The original cab had some trouble, so someone switched cabs without checking the towing capacity. Hawaiian mountain roads were no match for failed breaks on a too-heavy flatbed. Heading down the mountain, there was no stopping the out-of-control truck.

“Terrence remained a soldier ‘til his very last moment,” Jillian shares. “His last words were, ‘Take it to the left, we’re going for a ride . . . ’” a decision that ultimately saved the driver’s life but cost him his own.

Cayleigh was five, and that’s when darkness began to win the tug-of-war. “I didn’t know where we were going to go or what we were going to do,” says Jillian, facing despair. In survival mode, Jillian, Christian, Cayleigh, and their 14-year-old dog, Catch, all moved to Illinois.

Old Catch died a few months later, and in an attempt to calm her children, Jillian got them a puppy named Fetch. Plagued with health problems, Fetch didn’t make it either, and in a span of 18 months, Cayleigh lost her daddy and two dogs. When she was eight, the family moved to Florida for a fresh start, and then her brother left home for college.

Jillian recalls those days—not long ago—with tears in her eyes. “Cayleigh slipped into a depression and she didn’t want to leave the house anymore. She was scared to make friends, because she thought that anything she loved would leave or die. She cried herself to sleep every single night. She still wanted her dad. We were down to just her and I, and I didn’t work anymore because she was too terrified to let me out of her sight.”

The Gold Star Connection

Jillian connected with other Gold Star moms, and one day, one of them shared a Facebook photo of her child and his dog, posted by Southeastern Guide Dogs. Jillian asked questions, researched options, watched as many Southeastern Guide Dogs videos as she could find, and then her computer went blank in the middle of filling out her application for a Gold Star Family Dog. Desperately needing help for Cayleigh,



A WONDERFUL, WAGGING LAB NAMED TAYLOR WRIGGLED HER WAY INTO JILLIAN’S HOME AND TUGGED HER WAY INTO CAYLEIGH’S HEART.

she called our school and reached Katie Perez, manager of our Children’s and Teens programs.

“Katie ended up on a Saturday—her day off—completing the application and a phone interview with me,” Jillian recalls. “And it was in that moment that I felt the magic starting to happen.” She hoped that they’d receive a dog in a year or two, without really knowing how long it could take.

Turning Point

Four weeks later, a wonderful, wagging Lab named Taylor wriggled her way into Jillian’s home and tugged her way into Cayleigh’s heart. And then Jillian and Cayleigh experienced a miracle, the kind that reminds everyone in the Southeastern Guide Dogs community why this dog, this mission, and these moments are so necessary and life-changing.

“Before Taylor, Cayleigh was in a constant state of sadness,” Jillian shares. “She self-isolated in her room. She used to sleep with a Walmart bag, and I never knew what it was. One day, I was cleaning her room and I grabbed it. Sadly, it was filled with tissues because she cried herself to sleep, under her bed, every single night. She’d long for her dad and her dogs and her brother, who had all come and gone. She was in a constant state of trauma. The day I learned we were going to get Taylor, I was so excited. But she didn’t have any reaction, and I said, ‘Aren’t you happy?’ She said, ‘I don’t get happy anymore. All my feelings are gone and I’m empty inside.’ She was still too scared to be happy.”

Taylor’s favorite game is tug of war, Cayleigh would soon discover, and today they play it for hours every day, along with dress-ups, napping in the sun, reading, and other simple childhood joys. ▶



**CAYLEIGH GAVE HER
HEART TO TAYLOR
IMMEDIATELY**

The day Taylor arrived, she began pulling Cayleigh gently and slowly toward new reasons to smile and new chances to laugh.

"I stepped back to watch it, and it just felt so warm and very loving," Jillian says. "I got misty eyed just watching them because Cayleigh gave her heart immediately. And I hadn't seen her do that in a very, very long time, to anything. They hugged for so long, and Taylor didn't pull away. She didn't run away. She didn't show interest in anything else. It's like Taylor knew that Cayleigh's heart needed some help, and that's why she was here. And now I can relive that moment every day. It was beautiful."

"Just like that, they became best friends," she continues. "She's taught Cayleigh that she's okay, and she's safe, but most importantly, she's taught Cayleigh that it's safe to love again. My gratitude is overflowing, all the time. When I go through the day and I hear her laughing in the other room, I automatically think of all the people who helped make this possible for us, people I won't ever meet, people who probably never thought about this situation that we're in."

To the Southeastern Guide Dogs family, Jillian says, "There are multiple times every day that I thank you, and I will never, ever stop. So, thank you a million times for the next million years. Taylor brought Cayleigh back to me, the little girl that I love." ●



BEHIND THE SCENES

Training our Dogs for Children

Guide dogs are smart, confident decision makers whose tails wag when the harness goes on. Service dogs are intelligent, intuitive lovers who often sense emotional distress. But what makes the best Kids Companion dog for a blind child, or Gold Star Family dog for a military family facing grief? Here's a checklist of what it takes for a dog to be selected for our children's programs.

- ✔ Smart, healthy, and fit.
- ✔ Extremely biddable—eager to please.
- ✔ Successful completion of early education and socialization at our Puppy Academy preschool and kindergarten.
- ✔ Strong leash manners with a stellar "heel." A child with no vision may use a tandem leash, along with the parent, so dogs are trained accordingly.
- ✔ 14 –18 months of house training, basic skills training, and real-world socialization with a trained volunteer puppy raiser.
- ✔ Demonstrated preference for their handler over other dogs or people, something our trainers nickname a "Velcro dog" because they are happiest when in close proximity to their favorite human.
- ✔ 1–6 months of advanced skills training at Canine University, depending on each dog's timing of career transfer into our Kids Companion or Gold Star Family programs.
- ✔ Absolutely no sign of aggression or body sensitivity. For example, if a blind child explores the dog using their sense of touch, the dog must be comfortable being handled and accidentally poked on occasion. If a grieving child wants to hug all day long, the dog must be a hugger, too.
- ✔ Calm disposition, with a demonstrated ability to be extremely comfortable with children.
- ✔ Exceptional house manners; for example, ignores toys on the floor and food on the counters.

Once a dog is selected as a candidate, the manager of our program for children and teens—a certified trainer—takes the dog home for an extended stay. She observes the dog closely in a home environment, assesses its manners, fine-tunes its training with a specific child in mind, and conducts body pressure exercises to see how the dog reacts to handling. After she matches a dog with a child, she delivers the dog to the family and then instructs them on how to best care for this sweet, lovable, forever-friend, their skilled companion dog.

As with all of our dogs and services, we provide our Kids Companion Dogs and Gold Star Family dogs at no cost to the children in need. To provide these dogs as gifts, we rely on the kindness of our generous Southeastern Guide Dogs family. Thank you!

FRIENDS, BECAUSE OF YOU, MILITARY FAMILIES FIND HOPE AGAIN.



Fromm is 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.

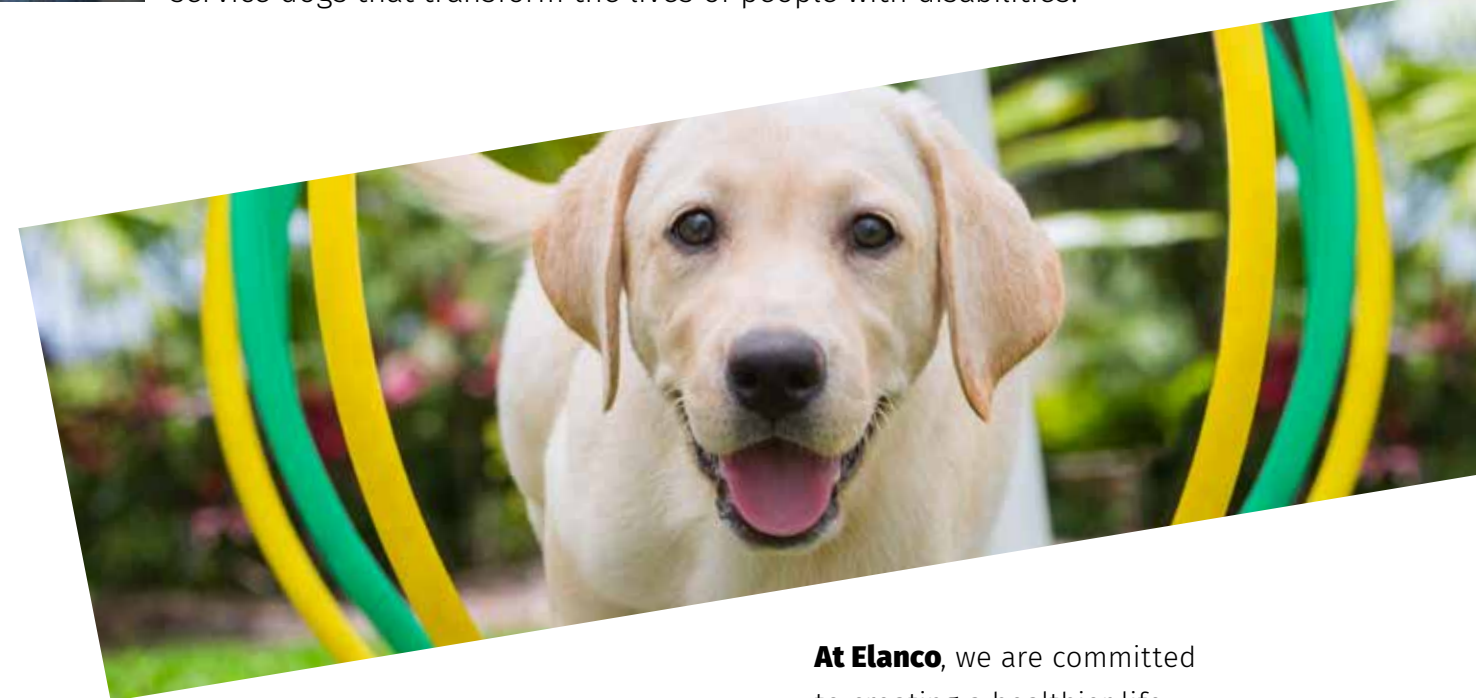


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Elanco is proud to be the Official Sponsor of Preventative Health Products for Southeastern Guide Dogs

We support long and healthy lives for the incredible guide dogs and service dogs that transform the lives of people with disabilities.



At Elanco, we are committed to creating a healthier life for animals everywhere. That means a more comprehensive portfolio of products along with unparalleled service and support for the health of animals, and for the good of people and the planet. **Elanco Healthy Purpose™**



HOOCH

The Service Dog
Who Saved
My Life

By Drew Sestito, combat veteran

I'd like to share how Southeastern Guide Dogs saved my life by giving me my best friend, Hooch. Unlike most best friends, mine is covered in fur, has a tail that wags like a top notch propeller, and instead of a handshake, he prefers licking my face until it looks like I just came out of the shower. I wouldn't have it any other way.





WHEN I LOOKED INTO THE EYES OF A BLACK LAB, SUDDENLY, I FELT ABSOLUTELY NO THREAT OR FEAR.

FOLLOWING DEPLOYMENT, NOTHING WAS RIGHT. MY LIFE PLUMMETED AFTER AFGHANISTAN.

FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

But let's back up to 2011. When I was 17, I joined the U.S. Marines and later deployed to the Sangin district of Afghanistan. As a 20–21-year-old in combat, my experiences and actions had to be done to ensure the safety and survival of myself and my brothers who were with me through it all.

I saw and did things that I'd never imagined, that I never knew existed, and that I'd never be able to forget. But this isn't about those experiences. This is about my recovery and the dog who made recovery possible.

NOT-COPING MECHANISMS

Following deployment, nothing was right, but I forced myself to act like it was. My life plummeted after Afghanistan, but I walked around with a fake smile and a steady source of alcohol and drugs at all times, thinking that was normal. I called it a "coping mechanism."

But if you're a 21-year-old using drugs and alcohol to try to appear normal—like all of your chipper friends—and then premeditating the end of your life with an optimistic feeling towards that thought, then that is not a successful coping mechanism.

Eventually, I sought treatment and was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

I was transferred to Wounded Warriors Battalion on Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. First step: medication. By the time I was 26 and through my treatment, I was prescribed 46 different medications, up to 15 a day. I felt like a lab rat. With all of these medications, I still could not escape the constant pain, guilt, regret, and self-hatred.

So, I took self-medicating to a new and more dangerous level. Drugs and alcohol became a necessity for me to function. I was empty, and I walked amongst people I considered enemies and threats to my life. By people, I mean everyone: my best friends, my mother who has loved me unconditionally since the day she gave birth to me, and my entire family. My brother John, who is my idol and inspiration, wasn't my brother in my mind. He was another living life form and possible target if he were to approach me in any way I found aggressive.

As you can see, I was lost, sick, and absolutely out of my mind.

THE DAY THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

One day, my physiologist suggested a service dog to help my TBI and PTSD. A service dog was something I had never heard of, nor did I care, nor did I think it would help. Thankfully, it wasn't up to me; I was under orders of the Marine Corps and it was in the hands of the licensed physician who provided me with the answer to my prayers and the start to getting my life back.

After going through the eligibility process, I was approved for a service dog from Southeastern Guide Dogs. On March 15, 2015 I traveled to the campus to begin the two-week class. The first day, I met the rest of the class and trainers, but no dogs were provided yet. Little did I know, March 16 would be the day that my life would change forever.

That day, we waited in our rooms. I heard a commotion in the hallways, multiple footsteps, and something moving with a purpose. I felt nervous, and then my door opened unexpectedly. That's when I looked into the eyes of a black Lab/golden, and suddenly, I felt absolutely no threat or fear.

I sat on the floor. I had to get closer to this dog, the one who made me feel like I did before Afghanistan, before the drugs and alcohol, when I was simply just . . . happy.

My new best friend's name was "Hooch." A perfect name for a perfect dog. Everything about him was, and still is, perfect.

The first night, Hooch missed his trainer and slept by the door the entire night. So, I slept on the floor with him, just to let him know that, "You might not know me now, but you're going to love me because I already love you." ▶

PUPPY ◀ REWIND



Cuddly, Music-Loving Hooch

As a young, long and lanky puppy, Hooch was smart as a whip and a great source of cuddles, comfort, affection, and loyalty to his puppy raisers, the Cummings family of Marietta, Georgia. "He was a very steady guy," says Elizabeth Cummings. "Nothing phased him and he just rolled with everything." Hooch faced every new experience as a brave and inquisitive problem solver, such as figuring out how to paw tricky levers to open their French doors.

Hooch grew up surrounded by music, and relaxed easily in the basement band room where the family strummed guitars and banged on drums. From Florida Gator games to musicals, school concerts, parades, and church services, Hooch learned early that loud, live music and applause is a joyful part of life, a happy connection when he grew up to become a service dog for an aspiring musician and high school athletic coach. The family was sorry to say goodbye to Hooch, but very proud to see him share his love with Drew immediately and completely.

Hooch was sponsored by the Georgia Puppy Raisers and named in honor of the dedication of its members. The Chattahoochee River runs through most of Georgia, and a popular activity is "shooting the hooch" which is riding down the river through Atlanta in an inner tube.



LIFE IS BETTER WITH HOOCH

Within days he started to change my life. I began feeling happiness again, when I thought there was no such thing. I reconnected with family and friends who I had considered threats, only to realize that they've cared for me the entire time.

Hooch and I have been together over five years now, and we're so in sync with each other. We learned the cues in class, but now he already knows what I'm going to ask, without me asking. He always lets me know when someone is approaching from a blind side. He always remembers his training, and if he senses I'm uncomfortable, he gets closer to me and lets me know he's still there. There's never any sense of going through something on my own.

Hooch is exactly like me; I don't think Southeastern Guide Dogs could have matched us up better. He's got this tough-guy mentality, but when we go to sleep, we cuddle like humans. The way I speak to him and the way he responds, it's the complete opposite of what you'd expect from a combat veteran.

Since Hooch, my life is more hopeful. I'm coming out of an extremely stressful period into my *post-traumatic growth* period. No one really knows what the future holds, but I have a positive outlook.

A little over a year ago, Hooch was the ring-bearer at my wedding to Sydney, who I've known since high school, and now we have a new baby girl named Murphy. I have many favorite memories of Hooch, but one

HOOCH IS EXACTLY LIKE ME; I DON'T THINK SOUTHEASTERN GUIDE DOGS COULD HAVE MATCHED US UP BETTER. HE'S GOT THIS TOUGH-GUY MENTALITY, BUT WHEN WE GO TO SLEEP, WE CUDDLE LIKE HUMANS.

is of him lying next to our newborn child. We moved to Tennessee where I'm pursuing a career in music and coaching high school wrestling. We bought a house, and now we're just growing our family, living our lives, excited for whatever the future holds. I know that no matter what it is, I'll be able to handle it, take it in, and move forward. There's excitement, instead of, "Am I really going to be here next year, or the year after that?"

A special thanks to Southeastern Guide Dogs for saving my life by bringing me together with my best friend, Hooch. I know Hooch won't be alive forever but, with tears in my eyes, I can honestly say that he will always be with me, and I with him. I love him with all my heart, and I owe him my life. ●

FRIENDS, YOUR GENEROSITY SAVES LIVES. THANK YOU!



Photo by Guillaume Lechat

THE HEROES CHALLENGE

BOOTS

on the Ground

Did you ever wonder where the term "boot camp" comes from?

During World War I, the word "boot" was used as an alternative to "soldier," so a soldier's initial training was called boot camp. According to an Army historian, the phrase "boots on the ground" appeared in the 1980s, and means deploying more ground troops in a military operation.

Today, we're asking for more "boots on the ground" so we can put more paws on the ground, in support of the veterans who need our dogs.



Double your donation, up to \$500,000 until June 30, 2021. Visit [GuideDogs.org/challenge](https://www.GuideDogs.org/challenge)



DOUBLE YOUR DONATION TODAY

2021 Double Your Donation: Heroes Challenge

Right now, 580 people with vision loss and veterans with PTSD and other disabilities across the U.S. are depending on Southeastern Guide Dogs for ongoing help and support, and more than 119 veterans are hoping for a service dog of their own.

You can help more veterans by making a donation to our **Heroes Challenge**. Generous donors have collectively pledged to match every dollar you give, up to \$500,000, between now and June 30, 2021.

Your gift helps people like Dr. Jeff Ayers, the Navy veteran whose service dog, Murphy, gives him the peace of mind he'd been missing. And like Drew Sestito, the Marine whose service dog, Hooch, saved his life. You can read their stories here in this newsletter. And you can change more lives when you partner with us and put boots on the ground to help our veterans.

Help those who cannot see . . . and those who have seen too much. Join our Heroes Challenge today on behalf of the veterans we serve. Thank you for your kindness!

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 of Florida. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the state. Registration number CH0475.

SALUTE TO OUR HEROES Council

Here's a special salute to our friends on our **Heroes Council**. These individuals stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our veterans and have pooled their resources to create our \$500,000 Heroes Challenge. Because of their generosity, your gift will go twice as far. Thank you!

HEROES COUNCIL MEMBERS

- Jim Barge & Dawn McKnight
- G. S. Brooks
- Nancy & Bill Gacioch
- Marcia Gosline
- George & Mary Graner
- Ryan & Stephanie Jensen
- E. Liberty Foundation
- John & Susan Rapp
- The Sam M. Scituro Family Foundation
- Lester & Diana Shapiro
- Brian & Sherry Soucy
- Anonymous



THE NOSE KNOWS

HOW DOGS LEARN SCENT DETECTION

Sloopy is the excited one, the one who flies down the stairs, dashing to the front door when her foster family says, "Ready to go to work?" before her trainer picks her up for another day of fun and games. Joy lives her name, jumping straight into the air when her trainer says, "Yes! Good job!" Alia is the serious one, and when she alerts, she sits low and still, methodically waiting for her reward before wagging takes over her back half. And Buffy? "She's my on and off girl," says trainer Laska Parrow. "When she's working, she's quiet, reserved, and focused. And when she's not, she has an off switch: happy, wiggling, and loving her walks and adventures."

These four Labs couldn't be more different in personality, but they share a few traits, including the remarkable ability residing between their warm, wet noses and their super smart brains. These dogs are the first in Southeastern Guide Dogs' 39 year history to be trained specifically in **scent detection**. Laska, a certified service dog trainer and a certified associate instructor by the National Association of Canine Scent Work, heads up the initial efforts.



At the end of each spoke is a container filled with smells and distractions. One of those smells is the target, and when the dog finds the target and alerts, a yummy treat and praise complete the task.

Dogs' brains are uniquely wired to analyze smells. Labrador retrievers possess an estimated 300 million olfactory receptors in their noses, compared to about six million in humans. Generally referred to as "sniffer dogs" or "detection dogs," canines have been trained to detect substances such as explosives, fire accelerants, firearms, illegal drugs, human remains, wildlife, bed bugs, mold, and more. In the medical field, they've been trained to detect low blood sugar emergencies, cancer, neurological diseases, and more recently, COVID-19.

After much research, we plan to train our dogs to detect anxiety attacks and night terrors. Scent detection will enhance both our guide dog and service dog programs, as anxiety attacks and night terrors are often symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder or trauma related to vision loss. We also are beginning to train dogs in COVID-19 detection, utilizing sterile samples provided by

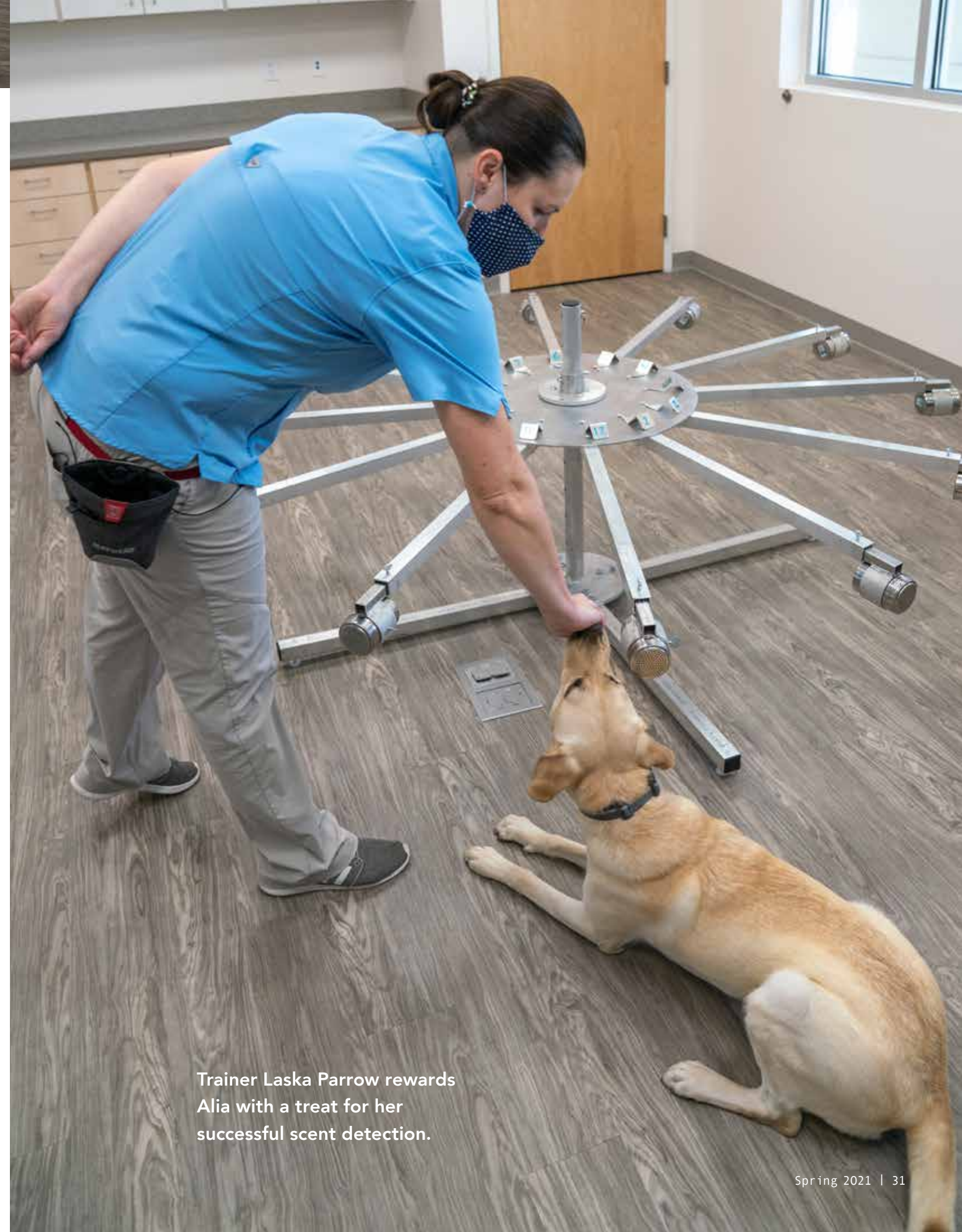
Doctors Hospital of Sarasota and proceeding with stringent safety protocols.

The program is in its infancy, and the future looks bright. "Innovation is at the heart of everything we do at Southeastern Guide Dogs," says CEO Titus Herman. "We're excited to maximize our dogs' incredible potential while making an even bigger difference in the lives of the people we are privileged to serve."

HOW DOGS LEARN SCENT DETECTION

Sloopy, Joy, Alia, and Buffy love what they do. Every day is filled with games of hide-and-seek, treats, and praise. Their brains thrive with the challenges, and their personalities shine with a steady stream of lavish praise for a job well done.

A typical "day at the office" looks like this. ▶



Trainer Laska Parrow rewards Alia with a treat for her successful scent detection.



FIRST,
WE BUILD ON THE DRIVE
TO SEARCH. THEN WE HONE
IN ON THAT DRIVE, AND
TEACH THEM TO SEEK
OUT THEIR REWARD.

Laska, our certified scent detection trainer, uses a large “wheel” with spokes extruding from the center. At the end of each spoke are containers, and inside those containers are the most delicious smells and distractions. Milkbones, for example. Used Nylabones, scented with the saliva of other dogs. A fleece tug toy braided with rabbit fur. Used coffee grounds, hand sanitizer, and wet wipes. One of those smells is the target, and when the dog finds the target and alerts, a yummy treat and a “good girl!” complete the task. Ignoring the other aromatic temptations, the dogs learn to ferret out the target odor quickly, efficiently, and with precision.

“First, we build on the drive to search,” explains Laska. “Most dogs have this drive; you’ve probably seen it when dogs are looking for food that children have dropped on the floor. We hone in on that drive, and teach them to seek out their reward, starting with treats hidden in containers. Then, we start pairing the odor with treats. We have them sniff the odor and reward them with a treat. Then, we have them search for the odor and still reward them with treats. So, it’s a lot like honing in on their natural ability to find food.”

Once the dogs have learned the process, specialized training begins. Let’s say that a veteran applies for a service dog,

and shares that night terrors are a pervasive struggle. Before being matched with a dog, the veteran provides a sample of a “night terror scent”—perhaps a piece of a sweat-soaked tee shirt, one that was immediately bagged and frozen the night of the episode. That sample becomes the targeted scent, the one rewarded with treats and praise. Staff would teach the dog to alert first by turning on a push-light with its nose, then nudging the human until the human responds. When the veteran comes to campus to train with their new service dog, the dog will be prepared with this extra-special skill.

Terror interrupted. A job well done.

The same process will be used to teach dogs to sniff out the distinct presence of COVID-19, or the scent of a pending anxiety attack.

As with any new venture, we’re still imagining and exploring the incredible benefits of our new scent detection program and how these dogs can impact our mission. Meanwhile, Sloopy, Joy, Alia, and Buffy are paving the way to our newest adventures of extraordinary dogs, transforming lives. ●



TERROR, INTERRUPTED BEFORE

Joe’s heart pounds between his ribs. His breath comes in quick gasps, and in the darkness, he senses trouble ahead.

Suddenly, the IED blast roars, debris exploding around him, the smell of smoke filling his lungs. Hot white light pierces his eyes as the searing pain rips through his back and down his legs. Finally, the sound of his own screaming jolts him awake.

Another night terror, courtesy of Afghanistan, 2010.

Joe’s heart pounds between his ribs. His breath comes in quick gasps, and in the darkness, he senses trouble ahead.

Suddenly, a light switches on and something damp covers his face, the smell of warm breath filling his lungs. He feels a heaviness on his chest, and dreamlike, he reaches for it—only to find a steady paw. Finally, a licking Labrador nudges him awake.

Another night terror avoided, courtesy of his service dog, sometime in 2021.

AFTER

FRIENDS, THANK YOU FOR HELPING OUR EXTRAORDINARY DOGS TRANSFORM LIVES.

WAYS TO GIVE AND IMPACT LIVES



HERITAGE
SOCIETY



Leave a Legacy
That Lasts

The **Heritage Society** is a group of caring individuals committed to ensuring the long term stability of our school through wills and bequests. To join, simply notify us that you have included Southeastern Guide Dogs in your will by **emailing heritagesociety@guidedogs.org**, and find out more at **Guidedogs.org/HS**.

Remembering Southeastern Guide Dogs in your will creates a legacy of kindness, and gifts of any size impact our extraordinary dogs. Don't have a will? We've partnered with **Freewill.com** to give you a simple, convenient way to write a legally valid will, at no cost. Get started on your will today by visiting **Guidedogs.org/will**.

Consult your tax professional for advice, and thanks for giving!



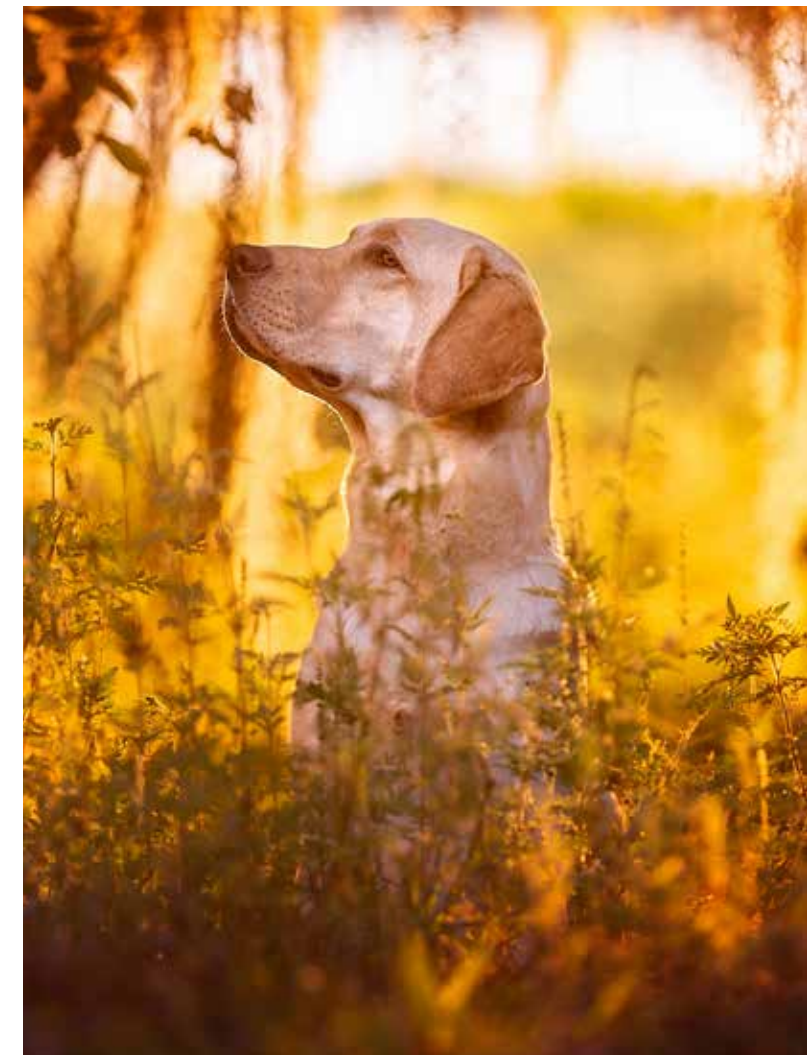
Sustaining dollars are the bedrock of our financial strength, and our **Cornerstone Society** is an important program for like-minded members of our community who believe in our mission. Your commitment to make a lasting difference ensures that we can provide our extraordinary dogs to the people we serve.

We invite you to join the Cornerstone Society, an exceptional group of donors who pledge a recurring gift. With your multi-year commitment, you will receive the following benefits:

- Exclusive invitation to our Cornerstone Society events
- An engraved nametag identifying you as a member
- Special listing on our donor recognition wall and in our donor honor roll

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

- Partner** | \$1,200–\$4,999 per year
- Benefactor** | \$5,000–\$9,999 per year
- Visionary** | \$10,000–\$49,999 per year
- Guardian** | \$50,000–\$99,999 per year
- Founder** | \$100,000+ per year



Join by filling out our easy, online commitment form at **guidedogs.org/cs**, or call **941.729.5665**.



**Changing the world,
one dog—and one life—
at a time.**

Dogs of *Destiny*

**Watch our new web
series presented by**



GuideDogs.org/DogsofDestiny