



Paws of Allegiance

Newsletter of Paws for Purple Hearts

Fall 2016

Paws for Purple Hearts San Antonio Enjoys a Warm Texas Welcome!

By Lindsey Velasco

Moving from the Bay Area, California, to San Antonio, Texas, was a huge move for our pups. The Paws for Purple Hearts girls, Allison and Ruby, and my dogs, Rex and Bravo, have spent the last few months acclimating to the humidity and heat of Central Texas. We've found a few great spots, such as Ink's Lake and the San Antonio River, to cool down!

As a PPH instructor, and program assistant, I am spending a lot of time creating networking opportunities with the VA Centers and the VA hospitals. We will have our first session with the VA Center in September; we were welcomed with open arms. We have been welcomed by San Antonio and find lots of support from the military families living in this community. Many active duty and retired veterans notice the phrase "Purple Heart" on our pups' vests and automatically get to chatting about how they can help, how to get a service dog, and to thank us for what we are doing for the military community. It can be a very humbling experience.

From training the puppies to weekly staff and administration meetings, and from answering emails and managing the San Antonio Facebook page to creat-



Photo by Kevin Escorpiso

ing orders for supplies, I am constantly on the move. Sometimes it doesn't feel like there are enough hours in the day! I'm always on the lookout for the next dog-related event in San Antonio and the surrounding areas to help spread awareness.

Our pups are still adjusting to the heat, so we try to get training done either very early in the morning or early in the evening. The girls love the water, and we let them cool off by relaxing near the rivers and lakes.

We are moving forward with our commands, and we are constantly taking field trips to get the girls plenty of practice in public. They currently live with Martin and me and enjoy the company of our pet dogs. Our pups are accepted everywhere, and we have not faced any access issues in San Antonio.

We currently have two puppy homes where our girls spend their weekends! They are a great help to our mission, as they provide extra socialization and a chance for our girls to relax. We greatly appreciate the help that these two wonderful families bring to Paws for Purple Hearts San Antonio! We can definitely tell that our amazing families love and cherish these girls, and we are greatly appreciative that we've found superb host families.

Paws for Purple Hearts Warmly Welcomed to San Antonio, Texas

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The San Antonio Botanical Garden hosted a Dog Day event where we were invited by a local newspaper to talk about Paws for Purple Hearts. We enjoyed the beautiful gardens and fountains and met other dog owners in the San Antonio community.

In August, we attended our first big event — the Austin Pet Expo. We had a great turnout and received plenty of praise and support from the Austin pet community. Networking was a huge success, and we are thrilled to start working with the local community and businesses. We've received many inquiries on volunteering, pet training for veterans, and how to be part of our great organization and heard many personal accounts and stories about loved ones who have served.

I am beyond grateful to be a part of Paws for Purple Hearts when I see the appreciation that the community shows. I am excited about our plans for Fall 2016!



Photos on this page by Martin Bergamaschi



By Martin Bergamaschi

I'm glad that I chose cynology as my career because, as a PPH instructor, I will be helping warriors who suffer from PTSD, TBI, and mobility issues. During my two months in San Antonio, Texas, I have experienced the warmth of people who observe our training outdoors with the service dogs. Many people have expressed their admiration at seeing young puppies responding to commands.

In this short time, we have had many people inquire about our program and how they can help. When I go to the grocery store with the dogs, I often find myself in the position of having to explain to children what a service dog represents. However, there are times that parents are familiar with service dogs and explain to their kids not to pet a working dog.

I can say that these experiences make me happy because I believe that, often, children can distract a service dog from doing its job. I believe that educating the community about service dogs is essential because it helps the service dogs to be attentive to their handlers.

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The Military Order of the Purple Heart and the Military Order of the Purple Heart
Service Foundation, chartered by an Act of Congress for combat-wounded Veterans

Alaska Paws for Purple Hearts ...

Making Connections Up North

“Not all of us that have PTSD have a great chance like this to help others.”

— Mike, PPH Veteran, Alaska

By Betsey Jacobs

Paws for Purple Hearts in Alaska has spent several months actively seeking the perfect spot for a service dog training facility in Fairbanks. We’ve had a few leads, but the right place hasn’t yet surfaced. We won’t let this stop us though! We feel that we are very close to finding the right place.

In the meantime, we’re spreading the word about PPH in the local community and making ourselves known by posting signs, using social media, talking to people, and pursuing information about local events. When people learn about what we do, they want to be a part of it. We have a long list of people who want to volunteer, and we look forward to having a PPH facility where they can do that!

Susan Sampson, owner of Pawsitive Dog Training, is one of our dedicated volunteers. Not only does she assist Nathan and me in training sessions, she is the Puppy Parent to PPH dog Sophie, taking her home nights and weekends, feeding and caring for the pup, and providing a comfortable, loving environment. Susan allows PPH to utilize her dog training facility for several hours per week, so we’ve been able to start providing our service dog training program, consisting of between eight and fourteen Veterans and Service Members who experience post-traumatic stress (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), or military sexual trauma (MST). Participants, taught by PPH instructors, learn service dog training concepts and commands as taught at partner or-



ganization Bergin University of Canine Studies in Rohnert Park, California.

During training sessions, each Veteran and Service Member is paired with a PPH service dog-in-training; they learn to teach service dog commands, socialization, agility, and scent training. In addition to sessions twice weekly, we recently began a weekly outing for participants to work with the dogs in public places. It is truly amazing to witness how the bond is established, how the relationship unfolds over time, and the growth in both the dogs and the Veterans.

Nathan and I recruit participants by reaching out to local organizations including Fairbanks Rescue Mission, Fairbanks Veteran Center, Fort Wainwright, Eielson Air Force Base; we also attend events with the service dogs-in-training wearing their vests, set up tables at vendor events, hand out brochures and business cards, post on social media sites, and post signs on bulletin boards (at local grocery stores, coffee shops, and such).

We grew from one weekly session to two in August, necessary to accommodate the growing interest in working with PPH. We are excited about having a facility in Fairbanks and providing services to more Veterans and Service Members — and their families.

Service dog-in-training Ann helps the Fairbanks PPH chapter make connections, meeting Governor Bill Walker, top; Congressman Don Young, left, with Nathan; and Chief Commander of MOPH,



"There have been times when my PTSD and TBI have affected me to where I did not want to go to dog training on Friday. I had to force myself to go, but after working with the dogs just that one hour, my whole day changed for the better. It is amazing what working with the dogs can do to one's attitude and emotional state."

— Jason, PPH Veteran, Alaska

A PPH Donor Writes:

"I thank you for caring for our guys. My husband is a retired Marine, and he has PTSD. It is hard to see them going through the torment. ... I make sure we have dogs in our lives, as he will get close to them but not people. ... Thank you for what you do. I am sure each soldier and Marine thanks you and the dogs."

— June Carolus



Photo by Sandra Carson

*Paws for Purple Hearts is grateful to the friends and family of **Erwin Marine**, of Westlake, California, for donations in his memory. Erwin served his country in World War II as a Transportation Officer and First Lieutenant.*

*In Erwin's memory, his wife, **Luanne Marine**, has generously sponsored PPH service dog-in-training Ruby, named in honor of Erwin's first wife. May they both rest in peace.*

"My husband is eager and wants to go every week. It is exciting to see something positive emerge from having a diagnosis of PTSD. He can give back to other Veterans, which is important to him.

I believe every person wants to feel a part of something. These dogs are providing that opportunity...

This group allows the members to show that they can be active members in the community, providing a needed service to others, while benefiting from the therapeutic benefits of working with dogs and each other."

— KB, married to a PPH Veteran



Photo by Sandra Carson

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"... Since my involvement with the service dogs at PPH, many of the negative symptoms and responses that I have experienced in the past have been easier to work through and in a few instances actually have negated completely."

— Jeff, PPH Veteran, Alaska