



# Paws of Allegiance

Newsletter of Paws for Purple Hearts

Fall 2017

## Venture for Veterans Scores a Win for Paws for Purple Hearts

Venture for Veterans™ Colorado Cycling Challenge was the first-ever national fundraising event for Paws for Purple Hearts. The organization anticipates many more successful Ventures in the future.

The Venture for Veterans Colorado Cycling Challenge was a huge success! Although final numbers await tallying donations from Venture for Veterans

Colorado Cycling Challenge, which continue to come in, Paws for Purple Hearts grossed approximately \$200,000, which will provide Warrior Canine Therapy and service dogs to more Veterans.



The kickoff for Venture for Veterans Colorado Cycling Challenge was on August 29, 2017, at Coors Field during a Rockies vs. Tigers game. The ceremonial first pitch for the game was

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## Paws for Purple Hearts Launches Therapy Center in San Antonio

Paws for Purple Hearts opened its largest Warrior Canine Therapy location on September 20, 2017. The center is deep in the heart of Texas in Military City: San Antonio.

The community showed great support. Volunteers, Veterans, and elected officials attended the ceremony to learn about the program and officially welcome Paws for Purple Hearts to town.

The grand opening celebration highlighted our Warrior Canine Therapy™ program in the newly renovated former United States Air Force “Red Horse” command building located on property that was once part of Kelly Air Force Base. This location is the first of its kind in Texas and promises to make a real difference in the lives of Warriors all over South Texas.



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# Warrior Canine Therapy Program Breeds Success

San Diego Paws for Purple Hearts provides Warrior Canine Therapy sessions at the Long Beach VA every two weeks and at the San Diego VA in La Jolla every week. Six Veterans participate at Long Beach; five in San Diego.

The Veterans, including Larry Worley, left, a Veteran who served in the Navy during the Vietnam War, all love learning how to train the dogs. They take great pride in knowing that they are contributing to the success of each dog's mission to help their fellow warriors. Their skills improve throughout every session, and the dogs love being handled by the Veterans! It is so rewarding to see the Veterans eagerly making a difference for their fellow service members.

## Puppy Petting Brings Together Volunteer, Namesake

If you are familiar with the Menlo Park Paws for Purple Hearts program, you know that Puppy Petting is one of the highlights for our volunteers and Veterans! In the past several months, though, we have not had a litter of puppies here. So instead of Puppy Petting, we have held Open Hours for volunteers, VA staff members, and Veterans to interact with our service-dogs-in-training.

During one of our Open Hours, DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) member and volunteer Aylene came to visit. It just so happened that

service-dog-in-training Aylene was here as well! As you can see, the two got along beautifully. We are grateful to Cupertino Rotary for the generous donations that allowed for Aylene to be named after this wonderful volunteer!



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Ruther Glen, Virginia	(804) 589-0077
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# Venture for Veterans, continued from Page 1

“thrown” by Yoko, one of the service dogs trained and deployed by Paws for Purple Hearts. Yoko’s perfect strike was delivered to the Rockies’ catcher, who welcomed Yoko with a huge smile. It’s unusual to see a catcher receive the ceremonial first pitch with such pure joy. The look on his face said it all: Witnessing service dogs for Veterans in action is heartwarming and cause for celebration!

Major, another Paws for Purple Hearts trained and deployed service dog, was also in attendance and expressed his excitement by playing with the world’s largest stuffed animal, Dinger, the Rockies’ mascot.

The crowd at Coors Field showed obvious enjoyment of Yoko’s pitch and support for Paws for Purple Hearts. Many wanted to speak with the Veterans, interact with Yoko and Major, and meet the Paws for Purple Hearts CEO.

The Challenge for PPH’s first Venture for Veterans™ was undertaken by Jerry Schemmel.

Schemmel is an accomplished sportscaster, motivational speaker and marathon cyclist, and he’s the Rockies’ play-by-play radio announcer. He wanted to bring attention to the challenges of wounded Veterans—and the solutions that Paws for Purple Hearts provides to these heroes. His Challenge was to cycle nonstop across the state of Colorado.

“The entire experience working with Paws for Purple Hearts was such a blessing to me! From top to bottom, this organization couldn’t have been kinder or more helpful,” Schemmel said.

While Schemmel’s main focus was to make civilians aware of the challenges wounded Veterans face, he also wanted to beat the UltraMarathon Cycling Association’s record for fastest nonstop solo ride across the state; 468 miles in 32 hours, 9 minutes. “What an honor to work with Paws for Purple Hearts and do a small part to help our Veterans. I believe civilians have an obligation to help those who have served our country,” he said.

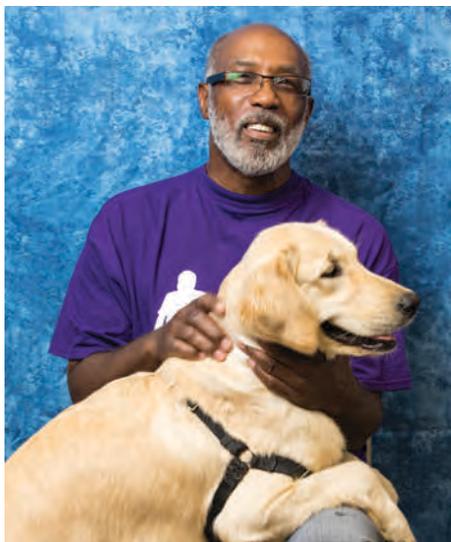
At dawn on August 31, Schemmel hit the road at the Colorado/Utah border with a support crew (including Veterans and service dogs Yoko and Major) and documentary filmmakers following in vehicles. He stopped along the route to thank community supporters. Schemmel peddled his hardest to raise money and awareness for injured heroes and Paws for Purple Hearts. He finished with an official time of 33 hours and 3 minutes, just missing the record.

The dogs, the Veterans they assist, the Rockies organization, and Jerry Schemmel have been amazing ambassadors for Paws for Purple Hearts’ mission throughout Colorado. Paws for Purple Hearts extends its deepest gratitude to all parties involved who made this Challenge a success and especially to the hundreds of individuals, corporations, and foundations that donated.

“I’ve been involved with a lot of fundraisers over the years, but this one, with Paws for Purple Hearts, might be the most rewarding I’ve had. Everybody jumped in and was 100 percent committed to our goal. I felt like a member of a special team, all committed to the same great cause,” Schemmel said.



# "Wonder Dogs" Not Just Pets for Wounded Warriors



**By Kenneth Harvey**

It's a delight to share with the readers of the Paws For Purple Hearts newsletter that the wounded warrior service dogs are not just your average pet. The Hunter

Holmes McGuire Veterans are training with the service dogs, and the joy and love are evident and refreshing.

"Man's best friends" begin service training as puppies; and in the presence of these puppies, new circles of life unfold. As Veterans, part of our experience is growing and walking alongside our lifelong friends. The dogs' training consists of learning commands aimed at improving Veterans' ability to live independently and regain normalcy and enhanced quality of life.

Months ago, I had no idea of what to expect when I enrolled in this program. Ms. Freda Sergi, my recreational coordinator, was instrumental in guiding me to participate. I had been waiting quite some time to receive a service dog, and Ms.

Sergi said that it would be a good experience to interact with the dogs-in-training to prepare for receiving a service animal of my own.

The unique gift I believe these wonderful dogs possess is their power to shower clients with love. Alissa and Heather from the program, the professional trainers for PPH Virginia, dedicate time to training each dog. The result is the chance for Veterans to watch these extraordinary dogs mature. Both trainers exhibit character and dedication in providing selfless service to the training program; they are paramount to the program's success.

I have found that the behavior of the dogs can impact our behavior in a positive manner. With their soothing personalities, the dogs can move our emotional state. My internal spirit has been forever changed. Being a part of this program has given me motivation and helped me overcome fear of being judged because of my disabilities. There is no doubt in my mind that other Veterans can benefit.

Most importantly, what we have learned will be life-changing. Camaraderie is the ultimate tool that is consistent throughout the whole process. I would suggest that there are hidden service dog powers, and they are unstoppable.

*Kennith Harvey is a Veteran and a Warrior Canine Therapy participant from the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Clinic in Richmond, Virginia.*

## Warriors Help, Inspire Warriors

Warriors Helping Warriors is the motto that drives us out into our communities every day, where we show what the love of a devoted service dog in training can do for wounded Warriors. Paws for Purple Hearts of Ruther Glen, Virginia, is fortunate to witness firsthand the incredible impact our dogs-in-training have on Warriors during social therapy visits, Warrior Canine Therapy™ sessions, and community events! Tim Eckert, a U.S. Army Veteran, works with Patsy in the photo. We are privileged to partner with the local VA medical center, a private hospital near Richmond with a Veterans wing, a national provider of retreats for Warriors, a prestigious VA facility in Maryland, and a retirement home for Veterans in Northern Virginia. The experience has been humbling. We are truly honored to witness how our dogs change a person's day — or their life — for the better.



# San Antonio Launch, continued from Page 1

The building can safely house 15-20 dogs and boasts two large training rooms. The first training room will be where Warriors participate in Warrior Canine Therapy with Paws for Purple Hearts puppies and dogs. The second area is where Warriors can socialize and learn basic dog obedience with their pets. In addition to the two main indoor training areas, the facility includes a “simulation bedroom” where trainers can practice cues in a home-like setting, a veterinary office, a fully functional kitchen, two whelping rooms, and a puppy zone devoted to puppy petting and training for the youngest puppies, those under the age of eight weeks.

The outdoor areas consist of five fenced yards with plenty of space for puppies to run and play, as well as room for agility training and other activities to support Warriors and dogs.

The grand opening event included a ceremony featuring many VIP speakers from the Texas State Legislature, San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and Port San Antonio. Following the speeches and ribbon cutting, guests were treated to hors d'oeuvres provided by culinary sensation Jason Dady and beverages graciously donated by Real Ale Brewing Company of Blanco, Texas, and Gabriel's Wine and Spirits.

Event activities included a live puppy cam, a silent auction, and plenty of cuddles from our two pups in training, Golden Retriever Noah and Labrador Retriever mix Ann. Paws for Purple Hearts Chief Operating Officer Dave Platte and Client Program Manager Laura Douglas traveled in to help prepare for the event and meet with the San Antonio community.

Paws for Purple Hearts is especially grateful to Port San Antonio for going to extraordinary efforts to ensure a smooth launch in San Antonio. The logistical, regulatory, administrative, IT, and even financial support were invaluable. We are greatly honored to be a part of the Port San Antonio family.

San Antonio's Home Depot Team Depot volunteer teams arrived several days prior to the grand opening event to help ensure everything at



the facility was in tip-top shape for the big day. Team Depot volunteers created a beautiful entrance, provided landscaping, built custom work tables and a one-of-a-kind dog agility course, built puppy runs and enclosures, repaired plumbing, and installed our sign and flag pole. They also donated refrigerators and a washer and dryer. Thanks to the dedicated and patriotic Team Depot volunteers, we were up and running faster than we could have imagined.

We are grateful to all who helped make the launch of our stunning San Antonio facility possible, including donors, sponsors, partners, local businesses, and beloved volunteers. Thanks to their support Paws for Purple Hearts is ready to improve the lives of more Warriors in San Antonio and throughout South Texas!

## Honor Roll

### Paws for Purple Hearts Gratefully Acknowledges the Generous Support of:

The **Jim Hicks Family Foundation**, for naming Oscar, a puppy in training in San Diego, Calif.

**Erin Mitchell**, for naming Noah, a puppy in training in San Antonio, Texas. Noah, from the Old Testament, means 'comfort.'

**Nancy Anne Jones**, of Anderson, Indiana, who organized a fundraising walk to support Paws for Purple Hearts. Walkers raised \$2,200 to help place service dogs with Veterans and provide Warrior Canine Therapy.

**Jacquelyn Moore**, for donations in memory of her son, Patrick W. Moore, a Marine who bravely served in Afghanistan in 2010 and 2011.

# The Man Behind Russell's Name: Donor Shares Her Father's Story

By Anne Preston

Russell, a Paws for Purple Hearts service dog-in-training, was born on December 5, 2016, at Bergin University of Canine Studies. At eight weeks of age, Russell and his littermate Buck relocated to Paws for Purple Hearts in Fairbanks, Alaska. Russell and Buck train with local Veterans and service members who experience PTSD or traumatic brain injury.

I named Russell in honor of my father-in-law, Russell (Russ) McConnell. Russ was born July 23, 1925, in Nixa, Missouri. He was raised on a farm and has many relatives living there. He really loved the mostly flat, lush, green, and slightly rolling hills of southwestern Missouri.

Russ was drafted into the Army for WW II shortly after marrying Peggy Shumate in May 1944. They were both 19 years old when they married; they were married for over 65 years, until her death in 2006. Russ and Peggy had two children: Dwayne, who now lives in Bethel, Alaska, and Jolene who lives with her husband, Kerry, and son, Daniel, in Texas.

Russ trained in Arkansas for several weeks before he was deployed by boat across the Atlantic to fight in the Army Infantry. After this experience, Russ hated to travel by boat, except when fishing the Kenai or fishing the smaller rivers in the Lower 48.

Within a few weeks of arriving in Europe, Russ was injured and almost killed during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944. The tank he was riding on was attacked with a land mine or percussion blast. Everyone on that tank was killed except Russ, who was outside of the tank, riding on top, at the time of the blast. He suffered



horrific injuries to his face and lower body and spent over a year in an Army hospital at Fort Bliss, refusing to let surgeons amputate his leg. Instead, his leg was stabilized with metal plates and screws that remained in his body until his death at age 91 in September 2016. Russ also lost an eye from his wartime injuries; when he was 88, he lost the use of the other eye to disease.

Russ never let his WWII injuries slow him down: He drove with one eye until a few years before he died, and he walked — without a limp — a mile or more most every day until his late eighties. Russ was especially gifted mathematically and could count cards and dominoes in his head so well that he knew what was in the deck, pile, or your hand before you did and would, if asked, tell you what would be to your advantage to play next. He worked 29 years for the

U.S. Postal Service and rose to the level of Post Master in at least one city in Missouri.

Russ liked dogs, and dogs were very fond of him, naturally gravitating to lie on his lap or sleep beside him while he watched TV or talked with others. He was a lifelong member of Al Amin Shriners in Corpus Christi and the Military Order of the Purple Heart. Russ visited the WW II Memorial in Washington, D.C., in 2012, a visit that had a profound effect on him.

Our family hopes that Russ's namesake can help a Veteran lead as normal of a life Russ did, despite his war experience. Russ had PTSD throughout his life, well before it even had a medical definition. He was finally diagnosed with PTSD almost 60 years after the Battle of the Bulge. We know that he would want to help anyone with war-related mental, emotional, or physical injuries; especially a Purple Heart Veteran.

# Puppy Parenting a Win for Veterans, Volunteers, and Puppies

Puppy parents are essential; they give our service dogs-in-training safe and loving homes during weekends, when they are not training with us.

*Puppy parent Dan Townsend, a Veteran, describes his experience:*

As a recent retiree, I am always on the lookout for volunteer opportunities that both interest me and allow me to make positive contributions. When I heard of the “Puppy parent” program for PPH, I immediately knew that this was something that I had to do. After a very quick and painless application and interview process, I was assigned my first dog, Alameda. Knowing in advance that, upon completion of her training, I would be saying good-bye to her, I was compelled to compress a lifetime of affection and love for the dog into a much shorter period of time. It was an absolute



pleasure, but soon it was time for Alameda to move on. The sadness of saying good-bye was quickly forgotten, as I have now taken on Timmy, my second PPH trainee. The chance to “parent” these wonderful dogs as they advance through their training is rewarding, fun, and interesting. Every weekend

is filled with enjoyment as I take “my” dog everywhere I go, as well as relaxing and playing with them at home.

The knowledge that the efforts of both the volunteers and professionals will result in a well-adjusted and highly skilled canine assistant being given to an injured American Hero is both humbling and rewarding. I will continue to volunteer for PPH as long as I can, and I would encourage anyone to do the same.

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## Donors Ease Strain of Training for Disabled Veterans in Virginia

A donor’s money goes far here in Virginia. Donations are essential to keeping our doors open so Veterans have a safe place where they can interact with our dogs, allowing us to expand our programs throughout Virginia.

Our generous donors helped the Ruther Glen Paws for Purple Hearts chapter make a purchase this year that eased strain on some Veterans. Crouching down to get a dog out of a crate can be a challenge for some Veterans who have disabilities. With our new kennel runs, Veterans are



able to easily identify the dog they are training, open the kennel door, and harness the dog for class.

We now have five kennel runs for our dogs in training, pictured, left. Also pictured, Sgt. Sara Chavez, a U.S. Marine Corps Veteran, works with Joan.



This simple improvement goes a long way to improving the services we offer to Veterans.

We couldn’t do it without our donors. We would like to thank each and every one of you!

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### Please consider going paperless!

Your donation will help more Veterans if you help us reduce printing and postage costs. How?

- Email us at [info@pawsforpurplehearts.org](mailto:info@pawsforpurplehearts.org) and ask for electronic newsletter delivery
- Or, on our website ([www.PawsforPurpleHearts.org](http://www.PawsforPurpleHearts.org)), sign up for the electronic version of the newsletter by filling out the form with your complete email address

**Thank you for helping us give more to the Veterans.**

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## Alaska Pups Reach Incarcerated Veterans

Paws for Purple Hearts Alaska has added Fairbanks Correctional Center to the list of sites where we provide Warrior Canine Therapy to Veterans. On alternating Fridays, PPH Instructors and service dogs-in-training visit the jail to teach the philosophy, concepts, and commands to 6 – 12 Veterans who are enrolled in the program. Each session consists of a lesson illustrating dog training concepts, a demonstration of service dog commands, and hands-on service dog training with the Veterans as the trainers.

It all started with a suggestion from one of the Level II Paws for Purple Hearts Trainers, a U.S. Army Veteran, who mentioned the correctional center as a possible site to work with incarcerated Veterans who might be interested in learning to train service dogs for fellow Veterans.



The Warrior Canine Therapy program is a wonderful opportunity for service dogs-in-training to learn skills and generalize skills to a new environment.

Participants experience hands-on training using a relationship-based training philosophy that requires trainers to use their energy to motivate and encourage, setting the dog up for success. Training the dogs is therapeutic in its own right; it also provides trainers the

opportunity to have a positive impact on the community, fulfilling the motto: Warriors Helping Warriors.

One participant reports, “working with animals has always been relaxing and therapeutic for me, not only knowing my work is going to a collective that may help others, but also the excitement of the animals.”