

# Southwest Region

San Diego and Bay Area Updates



**10<sup>TH</sup>**  
**PAWS FOR  
PURPLE HEARTS**  
**ANNIVERSARY**  
2011-2021

## Ten Years of Warriors Helping Warriors

### IN THIS ISSUE

**PLACED SERVICE DOGS:  
DREW AND LIBERTY**

**THERAPY PROGRAMS:  
CAWT® AND SOCIAL  
THERAPY**

**ALUMNI UPDATES ON  
RALPH AND TIMMY**

**HOWLIDAY  
ENRICHMENT**

### Placed Service Dogs: Drew and Liberty By: Southwest Regional Team

In July of 2018, San Diego received a new puppy from the breeding program at the Bergin University of Canine Studies. He was a labrador retriever mix named Drew that immediately stole our hearts. Drew began training with Selah Marting and from the beginning, he showed a promising drive and focus. Some of Drew's siblings remained in the program at Bergin, while his sister Liberty also joined Paws for Purple Hearts in California at our Menlo Park location.

Drew and Liberty continued to excel in their training and became the models of Paws for Purple Hearts, being displayed on our company van artwork. Drew's adorable looks, calm temperament, and ability to respond to any handler made him a fan favorite in our Canine-Assisted Warrior Therapy® and social therapy sessions. He worked with different Veterans at multiple VA locations, nursing homes, the Veterans Justice Outreach Center, and therapy sessions that we hosted at our facility. He was loved by his Puppy Parents, our volunteers, and our staff at the facility during his two and half years of training. We were all so excited for him to join a Veteran and fulfill his purpose as a full-fledged service dog.

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### Cont. Placed Service Dogs: Drew and Liberty



Michael and his service dog Drew

Michael Higenes is a Marine Corps Veteran who lives in San Diego and was introduced to Paws for Purple Hearts by joining our Canine-Assisted Warrior Therapy® program. Michael made a great connection to our program and applied to receive his own service dog. During the wait, he volunteered as a Puppy Parent and continued attending therapy sessions with us.

In August of 2021, Michael received the great news that his new comrade was fully trained and ready for Michael to be placed with him. Michael attended a two-week "Client Training" course with Paws for Purple Hearts San Diego and was matched with Drew. The two make an excellent pair, and Michael has already expressed how much relief he feels simply having Drew around and how much he enjoys having a service dog to assist him full time.

Liberty was placed as a PTSD service dog with Carlos, an Army Veteran. What makes Liberty's story remarkable - just like all of our dogs at PPH - is that Veterans in our Canine-Assisted Warrior Therapy® program helped train her to become the top-tier service dog that she is.

During her time in Menlo Park she helped countless Veterans and Active Duty Service Members in the Men and Women's Trauma Recovery Program at the Menlo Park VA. Each Warrior that worked with her had a hand in making her an exceptional service dog.

We sometimes say that our dogs choose their path, whether they want to be a service dog, a facility dog or if they just want to be a pet. We knew Liberty was destined to be a service dog early on. She had a gentle soul and the willingness to work and help anyone who needed help. She knew if you were feeling down or needed a break; she made a lasting impact on anyone who met her. We will always remember her fondly.



Carlos and his service dog Liberty

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## Alumni Update on Ralph and Timmy

By: Megan Franke, Advancement Associate

### Ralph

Ralph was placed as a facility dog in 2020 with Lori, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, right before the pandemic began. The pandemic made his job even more essential. Helping staff and Veterans alike, he provided the support that they needed after a long and stressful day.

**"Ralphie has been a Warrior helping me to share much support during these challenging times, plus he's given me strength when I am overwhelmed with stress. He is calm and loyal. He loves to be with other colleagues and shares his love generously."**

**- Lori, LCSW and Ralph's Handler**



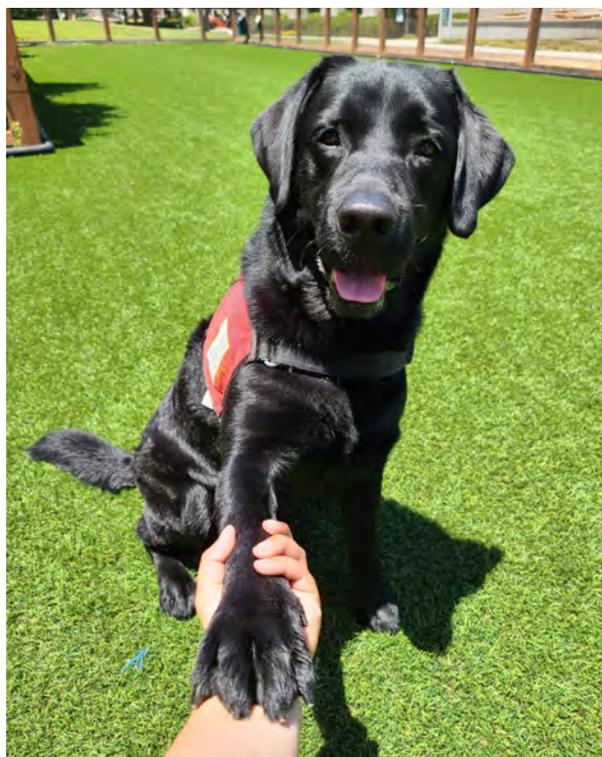
Ralph with his handler Lori

### Timmy

Timmy was placed as a facility dog in 2018 with his Handler, Marion, a social worker at the Menlo Park VA Women's Trauma and Recovery Program. Timmy helps Veterans in many ways. As a facility dog, he is a friendly face and provides a welcoming atmosphere to both staff and Veterans in the building. He joins his handler Marion in therapy sessions and also takes part in our Canine-Assisted Warrior Therapy® Programs where Veterans work with him to keep his training consistent.

**"Residents come in at different stages of readiness for treatment, of ability to trust, feelings of safety, and issues with power/control. Timmy immediately neutralizes these things for the women, often before they can become comfortable with these things around people. Working with Timmy has brought up issues they're dealing with in ways that talk therapy simply cannot or takes longer to do."**

**- Marion, Social Worker and Timmy's Handler**



Timmy saying hello

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Jilly at Social Therapy



Liberty and Arri visiting Veterans

## Therapy Programs: CAWT® and Social Therapy

By: Megan Franke, Advancement Associate

In the start of the pandemic, there was a lot of uncertainty. We were not able to meet in person and we were left wondering how to continue our programs and help Veterans in need. With the help of video conferencing, we marched on and found new creative ways to continue serving our Warriors. During the pandemic, when Warriors were feeling more isolated and helpless, we were able to connect with Veterans virtually to provide much needed support.

To further connect with our Warriors, we started weekly window visits with the Community Living Center at the Menlo Park VA. After almost a year of seeing our pups through the window we were able to have our first in person visit. "I remember seeing the Veterans' eyes light up. You could almost see their smile through the mask when they pet our dogs for the first time since the pandemic began" said Megan, Advancement Associate. "They just kept telling us how soft their fur was. It was so nice being able to have that close interaction. It was a special moment to witness." Being able to interact weekly with our dogs, even through the window, and for them to see our dogs grow right in front of their eyes makes everything worth it.

**"I remember seeing the Veterans' eyes light up. You could almost see their smile through the mask when they pet our dogs for the first time since the pandemic began." - Megan, Advancement Associate**

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## Howliday Enrichment

By: Kaitlyn Sacco, Program Instructor

The holiday season is a magical and exciting time for families and pets alike, but it doesn't come without its occasional stressors. Changes in routine can be stressful for our pets: layout of the home changing to accommodate holiday decor, guests and children coming over, or their families leaving or traveling while the pet stays at home. We can alleviate a lot of this stress simply by adding some fun enrichment to their routine. Enrichment is important because it activates the problem-solving part of our pet's brain, allows a healthy outlet for natural dog behaviors (like sniffing or licking), and tires them out. To combat the holiday scaries, here are my top holiday-themed enrichment ideas to keep your dog happy and relaxed amid the bustle:



San Diego dogs enjoying howliday enrichment

### *Social enrichment*

Organize a "Secret Santa" doggie gift exchange with your friends and their dogs! It gives them the chance to play with their friends and get some new toys that they haven't grown bored of at home. If toys aren't your dog's thing, try a doggie cookie exchange instead! Cooked pumpkin is a canine superfood; you can make a purée out of the pulp and a crunchy snack out of the seeds (check online for dog-friendly recipes). You can even use the pumpkin shell to hide treats in! If your dog isn't the best at sharing new toys or treats, maybe save the gift opening for home and have a play date instead to get those zoomies out before guests come over.

### *Cognitive enrichment*

Let's keep our dogs busy with a challenging and fun puzzle game! There are a lot of great options for puzzle toys online, but it's just as easy to recreate one at home with materials you already have. All you need is an old towel or blanket and some kibble or treats. Fold and/or roll your dog's meal or treats into a towel or blanket (supervise if you know your little guy tends to destroy towels or blankets). This allows them to use their nose and sniff out all the pieces of kibble hidden in the towel. It can turn dinner time from a 5 min activity to a 20 min activity, and it's way more fun! If you feel like adding a sprinkle of holiday magic, fold your towel into the shape of a holiday tree.

### *Environmental enrichment*

A nice long walk is a classic form of enrichment. Most dogs benefit greatly from at least 20 min of walking a day. Not only is this great for exercise (for both of you!) but it lets them interact with their environment by sniffing all their favorite spots and catching up on what's been happening in their neighborhood. If you live in a snowy area, make snowballs and turn it into a fun game of catch. You can even toss a few treats into the snow and turn your walk into a "find it" game.



## **Paws for Purple Hearts**

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