

# Paws of Allegiance

Fall 2023 Newsletter - South Central Region



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## Highlighting Heroes

**By: Claire Richardson, Marketing and Communication Specialist**

Over the years, Dr. Bonita Bergin has been acknowledged for her development of the Service Dog industry, as well as founding our organization Paws for Purple Hearts. This fall, it is our pleasure to inform you of her most recent venture, as she has been awarded the title of Person of the Year at the inaugural Purple Poppy Awards & Fundraiser held by the National Service Animals Memorial (NSAM)! Not only was she acknowledged as Person of the Year, but a separate organization originally founded by Dr. Bergin, Canine Companions for Independence, won Organization of the Year!



CEO Dr. Bonita Bergin alongside Canine Companion CEO, Paige Mazzoni

The National Service Animal Memorial has been authorized by Congress to construct a memorial site to honor the sacrifices and contributions made by Service Animals and pioneers in this field. This event was held to memorialize the passing of this bill and celebrate the achievements made within the community. The memorial itself will be positioned in the heart of the nation's capital to inspire visitors to pay their respects and gain a deeper understanding of the work done by the variety of Service Animals recognized in this exhibit. (Cont.)

To be honored at this ceremony was a milestone for Dr. Bergin and we could not be more grateful to celebrate this award alongside her. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank the National Service Animal Memorial for hosting this event and allowing us to take part in this historical celebration!

## Team Training in San Antonio

**By: Dani Garroutte, Marketing and Communication Specialist**

Congratulations to our newest graduates! This Fall, our San Antonio team hosted the most recent Client Training and Assistance Dog Graduation, celebrating our two newest Service Dog Teams. These teams underwent two extensive weeks of training where both human and canine worked to learn and understand each other and take the first steps to building a lifelong bond and relationship. After successfully completing Client Training, we honored and celebrated these two teams with our Graduation ceremony which was held at The Alamo, a historic landmark of San Antonio, Texas. Now meet our two new Service Dogs!

Debra is a two-and-a-half-year-old black Labrador/Golden Retriever cross and was trained at our San Antonio, TX site. She is an amiable-amiable little lady who runs on belly rubs and love. She is a social and extra lovable girl but dislikes photos so much that she shows her sassy side. With Debra's attentive eyes and calm demeanor, she makes for a perfect match for Tracey.

Kreitzberg, nicknamed Kai, turned two this August and was trained at our Anchorage, AK location. Kai is an amiable and expressive young man with a zest for life! Kai alternates between a serious and empathetic demeanor with a very intuitive nature but is always ready to show off his silly personality. His ability to connect with those around him and stay in tune with their well-being will make his partnership with Russell one in a million!

These two newly appointed Service Dogs are off on their new adventures with their new battle buddies, and we are so excited to see all the things they accomplish. Congratulations to these two teams. We wish them the best on this next chapter!



San Antonio Team Training Group Photo

## Another Year of Success!

**By: Dani Garroutte, Marketing and Communication Specialist**

The Warrior's Cookout Fundraiser at PPH San Antonio has come and gone, and what another success it was! The team hosted their 2nd Annual Warrior's Cookout on-site at their new facility, located on the Northwest side of San Antonio, off of I-10 West. Similar to last year, this year's Warrior's Cookout included local Veteran's resources, delicious BBQ from a Veteran-owned business, fun activities, a puppy pool party, and a newly added Silent Auction! Our community partners at [Valor Healthcare](#), [Affordable Dog Training](#), [Skylar Blue](#), and [Women Veterans of San Antonio](#), came out to share information with Veterans. Thank you to all of these amazing (Cont.)

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**Penn, Eaton & Debra greeting guests at the 2023 Warriors Cookout**

partners for supporting us! We would also like to thank the generous donors who provided items for our silent auction. With the help of these amazing individuals and organizations, and the exceptional partnership with Valor Healthcare, we were able to raise over \$18,000 this year! Last but not least, a hearty 'thank you' to all of our volunteers who gave their time to make this event a success.

We are so grateful for all of the support and generous donations we received this year and for all of those who helped make this event such a huge success. We are looking forward to our next Warriors Cookout in May 2024, so be on the lookout on our social media for updates! Keep up to date with us and all of our future events by following us on our Facebook page at @PPHSanAntonio, or Instagram at @pawsforpurplehearts.tx.

## **PAWS Act Update**

**By: Martha Schoenewe, San Antonio Site Manager**

Our mission of serving our community's disabled veterans by providing our canine-assisted sessions has been a wild success! As you know, we have had the distinct pleasure of being one of the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) Act pilot sites, and we could not be more excited about the healing witnessed. The loving paws of our Service Dogs-In-Training are out-shown only by the resiliency of our veterans.

PAWS Act by the Numbers as of October 2023:

- 🐾 7 cohorts
- 🐾 112 of session hours
- 🐾 42 of veterans served

The numbers are exciting, but the true impact can be seen in the faces of these brave men and women as they interact with our canines. Many come in apprehensive and not knowing what to expect, yet every single veteran that I have interacted with has left with their head held high and a smile on their face. Their experience here is life-changing. While the PAWS Act does not provide any funding to us for providing these wonderful sessions, we are proud to continue this work because of our generous supporters. We look forward to seeing how this program will impact Texas Veterans in 2024!



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Dr. Bonita Bergin

Paws for Purple Hearts is licensed by 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.



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