SIDE SIDE southeastern guide dogs inc



ISSUE NINE

About Us

SIDE SIDE is a publication of Southeastern Guide Dogs Inc.

Thanks to the generosity of our donors and volunteers, our extraordinary dogs transform the lives of people with vision loss, veterans, and children throughout the United States—at no cost to the recipients.

EXTRAORDINARY DOGS

What makes our dogs so special? Top-notch pedigrees, perfected over four decades of selective breeding. And thousands of hours of training, care, and love. The heartwarming result? Highly skilled four-legged friends who shine as true examples of unwavering loyalty.

TRANSFORMING LIVES

Our dogs form unbreakable bonds with their human partners. They turn darkness into light for people with vision loss. They restore freedom for veterans who have sacrificed for ours. And they heal the broken hearts of children struggling with loss.

AT NO COST TO RECIPIENTS

And here's the best part. Our dogs offer an invaluable service and give their love unconditionally, never asking for anything in return—and we follow their lead. We offer our clients their loyal friends, expert instruction, and lifetime support completely free of charge.



4210 77th St E, Palmetto, FL 34221 guidedogs.org | 941.729.5665

Hello

Dear Friend,

Four small paws pave paths of giant hopes and dreams.

Thanks to you, our dogs craft new beginnings and horizons stretching far and wide.

With unerring loyalty and unconditional love, these

marvels weave warm snuggles and affectionate nose-nudges into landscapes of healing, making hearts whole once more.

For our graduates, four small paws mean the world—and so does your support. Thank you for making dreams come true.

With gratitude,

Titus Herman

Chief Executive Officer

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Special thanks to

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Side by Side.

Our Dogs

WE PROVIDE OUR DOGS

& SERVICES AT NO COST



GUIDE DOGS offer freedom and confidence to teens, adults, and veterans with vision loss.





- Service dogs help veterans heal from physical and invisible wounds.
- Therapy dogs help patients and healthcare workers at military facilities recover from pain and distress.



SKILLED COMPANION DOGS

offer comfort and companionship to their human partners. They give:

- Friendship to children, teens, and adults with vision loss.
- ► Hope to veterans battling with despair.
- ▶ Relief to military families grappling with stress.
- Love to Gold Star families coping with grief.





Celebrate New Beginnings

OUR NEWEST GRADUATES



How New Companions Bring New Hope

A moment that changes everything—that's what our newest graduates experience when they first embrace their extraordinary dogs. And we know that this is only the beginning. Because every day, they'll find peace in their companions' presence, steadfast love in their eyes, and newfound freedom in their service.



Chance Agorastos | Guide Dog Kayden LEAGUE CITY, TEXAS

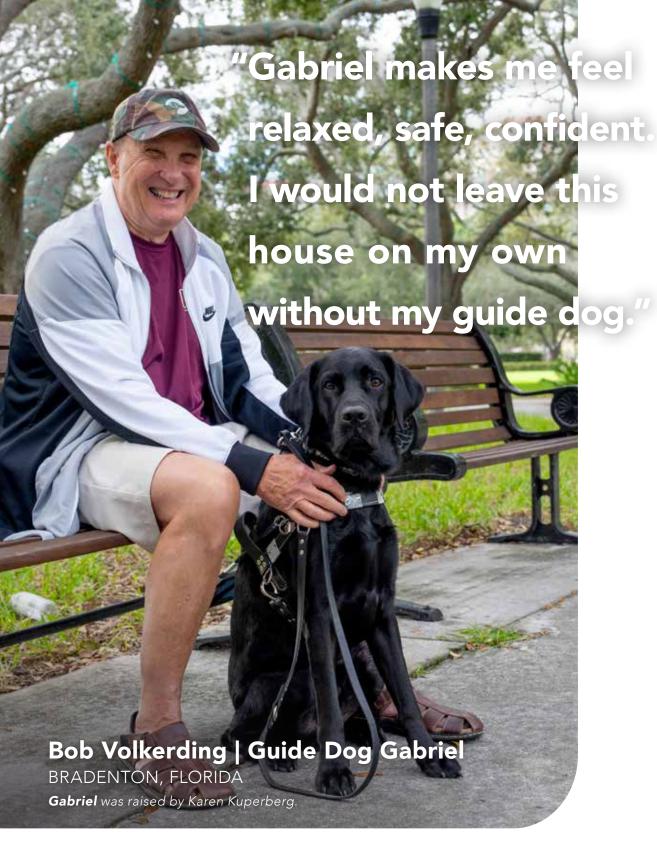
The fear of not being able to find the door. The anxiety that he'd miss the stairs and not know quite when to make the turn around a corner. Chance made a habit of following closely behind people to match their footsteps and follow their path. It was the best way he knew to navigate the world without a cane.

But when Chance started college, he found that following others simply wouldn't cut it. Reluctantly, he gripped the white cane in his palm, knowing the stigma it carried—a barrier to meeting others and an awkward item that stood in his way.

Now, sweet guide dog Kayden lights up Chance's future and brings new excitement to college days. He invites conversation and draws people in. "Going to new places is a lot less scary knowing that I have a partner," Chance says. "If something goes wrong. I have a little companion to help me figure it out."

Chance no longer needs anyone's footsteps to follow, because he has four faithful paws leading the way.

Kayden was raised by Gina & Olivia Bixby.

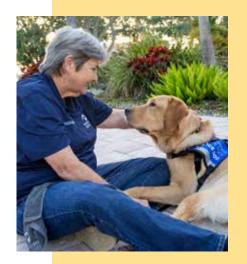


"Byner surrounds me with comfort, with confidence. When he looks at me, it's like he's saying, 'Come on, we've got this."

Rachel Hughes | Service Dog Byner

U.S. ARMY VETERAN

Byner was raised by Linda Gassner.



Lucy | Skilled Companion Dog Roy

MCKINNEY, TEXAS

Thirteen-year-old Lucy faces unique challenges which often act as a barrier between her and her peers. But now Roy, a sweet yellow Lab, boosts Lucy's confidence, bridging the gap between her and the rest of the world.

"With Roy here, Lucy is a new person," her dad says. "She radiates joy."

Roy was raised by Brenna Yuknis.



"Bree unlocked something in me. I call her my superhero."

Darin Lee | Guide Dog Bree GREEN COVE SPRINGS, FLORIDA

Bree was raised by Sue Croley & Bob Minthorn.







"Franklin is a calming presence in our home, and we feel very blessed to have him in our family."

—Cecelia's mom, Erin.

Cecelia | Franklin Gold Star Family Dog

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

Franklin was raised by Jim Ebling.



Dean Maurer Guide Dog Max

CEDAR FALLS, IOWA

Living in a constant state of hesitation,
Dean Maurer got to a point where he didn't
want to leave his house because the fear of
tripping and falling grew as his vision loss
progressed. Now with loving Max, Dean
lets go of the fears that once kept him
inside the walls of his home and takes hold
of the leash to independence. "It feels like
it was meant to be," Dean says.

Max was raised by Tracy Horrell.



Christina Wills | Service Dog Nick

U.S. ARMY VETERAN ■
BLYTHEWOOD, SOUTH CAROLINA

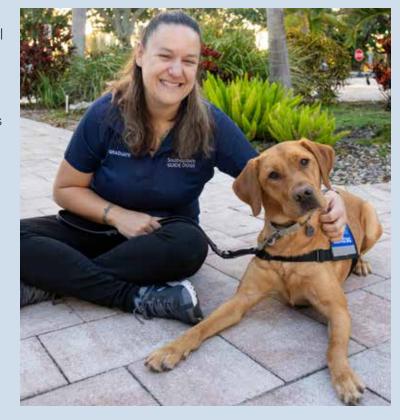
Never knowing when a sudden loud noise would startle her into a panic, veteran Christina Wills lived with the stress of the unknown. Her time overseas serving as an Army medic and participating in disaster relief taught her how to handle emergency situations, but it did not prepare her for the triage of maintaining her peace once she returned to civilian life.

Now, when Christina feels lost in the powerful memories, unsure of how to bring her thoughts to the present moment, service dog Nick provides just the remedy of healing. She gently nudges Christina, resting her fluffy head on her lap, pulling her guardian back to the here and now. Back to a place of safety and comfort.

"She's keyed into my emotions and how I'm feeling," Christina says. "She makes me happy. Every time I see her, she just brings a smile to my face."

With two children and a busy schedule as a school nurse, Christina looks forward to bringing Nick along to remind her that life happens in the details of each moment. Each smile. Every celebration. There's no time for slipping into the past when a playful, loving dog joyfully leads her into a bright future.

Nick was raised by Dixie & Marshall Yearta and Joyce Wells.



"Sometimes during our walks,
I just stop and hug Rebel, with
tears in my eyes. The freedom—"
he pauses. "It's incredible."

Jesse Miller | Guide Dog Rebel II

LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA

Rebel II was raised by Cailin Winokur.



Kathy Burnthall | Guide Dog Parker

MILTON, GEORGIA

Seconds after Kathy's guide dog, Parker, refused to guide her across the street, an electric bike zoomed past. "Parker disobeyed me," Kathy says. "And wow, am I grateful." This sweetheart of a dog loves Kathy fiercely, even to the point of knowing when to say no—determined to keep her forever friend safe. Now, Parker leads Kathy into a life she never expected. Into a bond she once thought impossible.

Parker was raised by Reinette Adams.



"Taylor has opened up my heart.

I feel safe, secure, and loved. She can see what others can't, and she's right there, loving me through the hard days."

Renee Andrysiak Guide Dog Taylor

VENICE, FLORIDA

Taylor was raised by Amra Dillard Rickwa.





Terry Riley | Guide Dog Trudie

U.S. NAVY VETERAN ■ MELBOURNE, FLORIDA

As a pilot, Terry Riley was put through routine medical evaluations. One after the other, passing them all, until the exam that revealed his vision loss changed everything. Now, his guide dog, Trudie, reminds him he's not alone. "Trudie fills a void," Terry says. "She understands me and gives my life meaning."

Trudie was raised by Sharon & Jim Skiles.



"Before, I was scared to go out, even skittish. But Ernie just goes and goes and I happily go with him."

Mary Bell | Guide Dog Ernie CRESTVIEW, FLORIDA

Ernie was raised by Malcolm Miller.



Manatee County Sheriff's Office Facility Therapy Dog Laura

BRADENTON, FLORIDA

Law enforcement: a rewarding but tough career. Fear and anxiety arise during difficult situations, but for the Manatee County Sheriff's Office, facility therapy dog Laura breaks through the shadows. This beacon of light raises the morale of her co-workers and soothes their tension. Her pure, happy presence makes the harsh reality easier to bear.

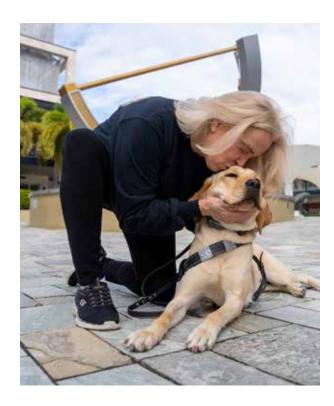
Laura was raised by Jason & Sheryl Juday.

Katherine Moore Guide Dog Saunders

OAK RIDGE, TENNESSEE

"Animals give so much love. And when you're dependent on an animal—not just for your safety, but for everyday life—this creates an extraordinary bond for which I have no words."

Saunders was raised by Brenda Bellay.



Hank Ford Service Dog Tommy

U.S. ARMY, MARINE, AND NATIONAL GUARD VETERAN ■ FORT LUPTON, COLORADO

After 20 years in the military and various war zone deployments, Hank's struggle with post-traumatic stress began to seep into everyday life. Then Hank met Tommy, a yellow Lab who brings light into his darkened life. Tommy may not erase Hank's painful memories, but his gentle presence and exuberance for life help Hank move forward, into a better future.

Tommy was raised by Mary Sitton.





"We're this cool little tag team, building each other's confidence. He gives me peace and makes me so happy. I feel safe with him."

Gennea Wallace | Service Dog Crowder

U.S. ARMY NATIONAL GUARD VETERAN ■ DADE CITY, FLORIDA

Crowder is raised by Larry & Diane Burrows.



Jessica | Pete Skilled Companion Dog

U.S. ARMY **■**HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

Eleven moves in 18 years. The challenge of constant change began to take a toll on this Army family. Now, intuitive skilled companion dog, Pete, brings a touch of consistency to their norm of change. "Pete's been such a blessing," Jessica says.

Pete was raised by Sharon & Karl Whitehead



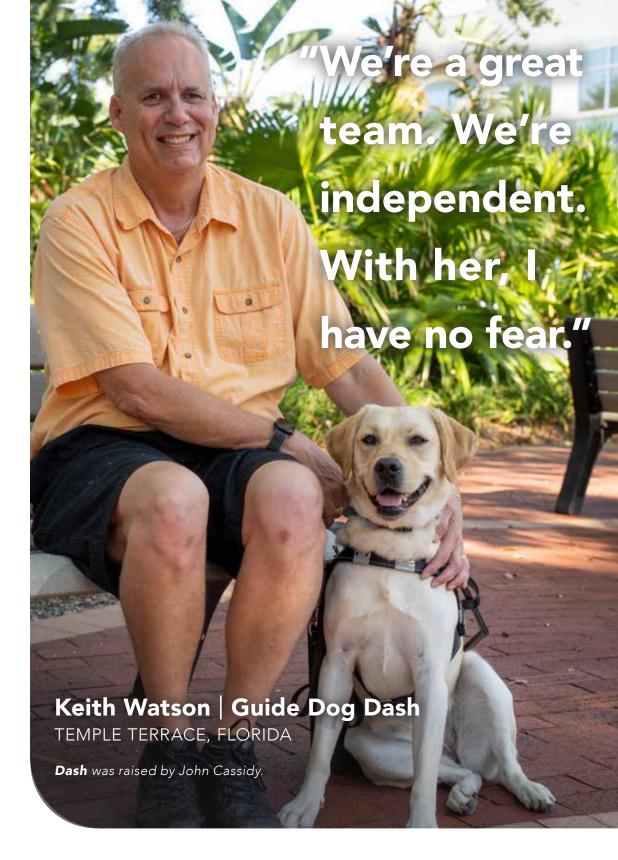
"Wherever we go, Walter is my eyes.

I feel so thankful; so blessed."

Sandra Bullins | Guide Dog Walter

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA

Walter was raised by Tiane DeVore.







Emily Anderson | Guide Dog John

COLLEYVILLE, TEXAS

College: for most teens, a complicated but happy time of transition. Life, with all its possibilities, waits to be discovered. But for Emily, born with visual impairment meant living with constant anxiety, dark depression, and the deep pain of isolation.

After attending Guide Dog Camp for Teens, Emily knew the answer to her prayers just might be the pure love and devotion of a dog.

Happily, a gentle giant of a goldador named John became her ideal sidekick. "He's different from what I expected, but he's everything I wanted and needed," Emily says.

So in tune with Emily's moods, John relieves her anxiety, touching his nose to hers with a soft *boop* or resting his chin on her knee.

But for Emily, the term *guide dog* carries an even deeper meaning. Before Emily's grandfather passed, her dad asked him to watch over his babies. Emily is sure the man she never met has kept that promise—because he shares a name with the loyal dog at her side.

John was raised by Liz & Bud Hilton.



Jace | Skilled Companion Dog Bentley

PANAMA CITY, FLORIDA

What started as a snowy, fun-filled day of sledding soon turned into a nightmare for five-year-old Jace. A terrible accident. A week in the hospital.

And complete loss of sight in one eye.

Traumatized, this bouncy, energetic boy shrank into himself. Scared to be alone. Scared to sleep alone.

Why did this happen to me?

Complex questions and difficult feelings no child should have to wrestle with.

Fast forward one year, and this now six-year-old has begun to rediscover his outgoing, fearless self—thanks to the love of his furry friend, Bentley.

"Jace and Bentley are both so active and energetic," his mom, Carmen, says. "When Bentley

gets the zoomies, she jumps straight into the air. She completely matches Jace's personality."

This happy pair loves to play hide-and-seek, even though Bentley finds Jace immediately. But Bentley is more than a playmate. Because of her warm presence, her favorite little boy no longer fears being alone. And for two parents worried about their son's well-being, they know he's in safe paws.

A little boy pulled from his place of hiding by a faithful companion who knows exactly where to find him.

Bentley was raised by Jacqueline & Robert Whitaker.



"Every day brings new emotions laughter, happy tears, sometimes both at once."

Janice Brennan | Guide Dog Karina

NAPLES, FLORIDA

Karina was raised by Linda Tiffan and Elli Freihofer.



Sherry Tignor | Guide Dog Anna

SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

A white cane makes some feel invisible, but for Sherry, it brought too much attention. "It's like there was a flashing sign over my head which read, 'Feel sorry for her; she can't take care of herself." But now, a sweet, energetic guide dog named Anna gives Sherry a renewed sense of freedom. "With Anna, I can get out and go, without needing someone with me," Sherry says.

Anna was raised by Marie & Cecelia Ferguson.



"Donna brings a level of amazement and wonder. With her, every day is another opportunity to learn something new, and that's a tremendous gift."

Tony Ortiz | Service Dog Donna

U.S. NAVY VETERAN MARGATE, FLORIDA

Donna was raised by Wendy Polisini and Karen Alexander.





"I never in my life expected something like him. I go to bed thinking of him. He's my first thought when I wake up. And for him, I think it's the same."

Randy Payne | Guide Dog Bandit II

COPPELL, TEXAS

Bandit II was raised by Kathy Andress.



Sara | Guide Dog Shelby

NEWMAN, GEORGIA

Sara spent her first year of college taking virtual classes. This year, she's navigating the excitement of campus life and all the challenges that come with it. But she's not doing it alone. A smart, snuggly black Lab named Shelby walks alongside Sara. Whether they're relaxing in the dorm room or exploring campus, these two know one thing for sure: they belong together.

Shelby was raised by Maggie Hamm.

Erika Gorden Guide Dog Skyway

CLEARWATER, FLORIDA

For Erika, a white cane served as a giant sign: Opinions Welcome. Erika already grieved her gradual vision loss, but the judgment of strangers left her even more exhausted. Then came sweet, attentive Skyway. "I don't have to explain myself to Skyway," Erika says. On hard, tearful days, Skyway looks straight at Erika and places her head gently in her lap. It will be okay, her pup gaze says.

Skyway was raised by Marianne LeBar.



Alyssa Daly-LaBelle Service Dog Declan

APOLLO BEACH, FLORIDA

Anxiety has a way of creeping into the spaces of life—into the silent moments. For Alyssa, it consistently played as background noise. A constant nagging that she battled for as long as she can remember. Now, Declan brings calm to her once chaotic thoughts. "I don't feel alone," Alyssa says. "Declan's by my side, boosting my confidence."

Declan was raised by Jennifer Ross.



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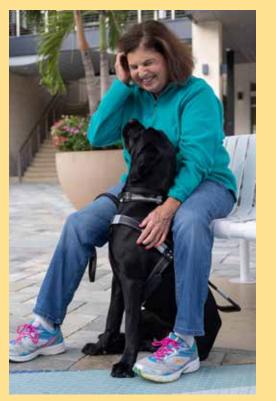


John Alvarez Service Dog Randall

U.S. AIR FORCE & NAVY VETERAN ■ SATELLITE, FLORIDA

"When I start to get uptight, Randall will put his head on my lap, and just look at up at me. That just calms me down. I have this little soul that's now tied to me, and we're gelling into a team."

Randall was raised by Lauren Thibert & Angel Ramirez.



Pam Fernandes Guide Dog Jayhawk

NEEDHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

For years, Pam spent mornings without speaking a word. But now, she starts her day with the same two sounds. Her own voice, cooing a soft hello, sweet girl. And the happy thump of a tail against the floor. "My first thoughts upon waking go to Jayhawk, not myself," Pam says. "I want to get up—because I have someone else to care for."

Jayhawk was raised by Charlene Doll and Beth Bernet.

"With Millie, my mood is better.

I feel fuller and in a better place.

Life feels good."

Jeffrey Mueller | Service Dog Millie

U.S. NAVY VETERAN ■
FREDERICK, MARYLAND

Millie was raised by Denise & Ethan Boston and David Diaz.



Grayson | Chewie Skilled Companion Dog

TIPP CITY, OHIO

An energetic eight-year-old boy, Grayson; an unbelievable diagnosis and a steadfast hope that keeps this family going. "As soon as Chewie got here, it was as if she knew why she was here," his mom, Emily, says. "She was here for Grayson."

While no words can describe the pain Grayson's parents experience, loyal Skilled Companion Dog Chewie understands her mission and refuses to leave Grayson's side.

Chewie was raised by David & Kim Gaide, Roy & Anina Green, and Natalie Nielsen.



"Boeing's not just making a difference." She <u>is</u> the difference."

Bernie Kieffer | Boeing Skilled Companion Dog

U.S. NAVY VETERAN ■ SUN CITY CENTER, FLORIDA

Boeing was raised by Patricia Burke & Lew Eads.





Anonymous Service Dog Tracker

U.S. MARINE VETERAN **FLORIDA**

"Tracker buries his face under my arm or against my chest, and I'm able to sob with him and just embrace the powerful connection between us. He lets me know that I'm not alone."

Tracker was raised by Jennifer Buffington.



"He's incredibly smart, with a phenomenal work ethic. I can just relax and go with him."

Miriam Zwitter | Guide Dog Millar

OOLTEWA, TENNESSEE

Millar was raised by Judy McKerlie and Maelynn Beevers.



Ryan & Family | Clifford **Skilled Companion Dog**

U.S. MARINE VETERAN ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

Skilled Companion Dog Clifford keeps Ryan, Dana, and their four boys steady, bringing comfort and calm through the business of life. Although this 'Velcro' dog leans against his humans to get as close as possible, they lean back, depending on him for the peace and joy only a dog can give.

Clifford was raised by Marcia Gosline & John Mattoccia.



creates a legacy of kindness, and gifts of any size impact our extraordinary dogs.

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Can one dog change a life?

Just ask our alumni. New adventures, days of hope, nights of peace—the change these exceptional dogs make doesn't end when they meet their soulmates. It grows. With every act of love, moment of trust, and step of courage, these special bonds reach greater depths and soar to new heights.



LIGHT + LOVE

- Karen Lucas & Guide Dog Reagan

MATCHED 2022

"Reagan has taught me to love freely, without reserve.

To not hold a grudge. This is how my guide dog lives, and I want to live that way, too."

Where are They Now?

ALUMN UPDATE



Michael Harrell & Guide Dog Honor

MATCHED IN 2016

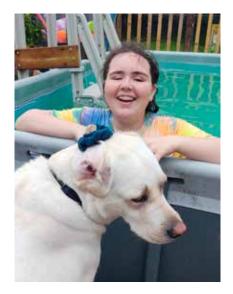
Michael's third guide dog, Honor, gently leads him through life—and even up mountains. This happy trail pup helps Michael navigate every root and rock along their hikes.

"Honor shows her love every day," Michael says. "At home, she follows me around and lies on my shoes. People describe the loving looks she gives me. Her interest in my safety is an amazing testimony to her devotion."

Abi & Skilled Companion Dog Lexi

MATCHED 2020

"No matter who you are or what you've done, a dog shows you true, unconditional love. That's Lexi. She's loyal and loves every bit of me."



Lea Gaffen Kessel & Guide Dog Marston

MATCHED 2022

"On a cruise with Marston, we were walking quickly in a dim area. I thought I could see well enough, but she abruptly stopped. I then realized we were right in front of a stairwell. Had she not stopped, I would've fallen down several stairs."



COURAGE + CONFIDENCE



Teresa Galgano and Guide Dog Donald

MATCHED 2021

Teresa earned a hard-won master's degree from the University of Florida, but she only walked across the stage at graduation because of her guide dog, Donald—and the whole audience cheered.

"Because of him, I've gone skiing, fly fishing, golfing, and hiking, too," Teresa says. "Donald makes me fearless."



Tanya O'Brien and Service Dog CharleyMATCHED 2019

"Because of Charley, I can engage more in the lives of my children. I can go to their events and navigate crowded places that were once overwhelming. And Charley barely needs her cues anymore—she does them on her own. She knows what I need before I do."

Rachel Hyche and Guide Dog Betty Jo

MATCHED 2023

"Before I got Betty Jo, I was convinced it was easier to not do something scary or challenging. Now I do so much more than I ever thought I could."



HEALING + HOPE



Bob Macpherson & Service Dog Blue

MATCHED 2017

In Bob Macpherson's words: "Greatness walks on four legs." And it's true. His service dog, Blue, brings light even on the darkest days.

Thirty years in the Marines gave Bob a fear of vulnerability and weighty survivor's guilt; Blue gives him courage, self-compassion, and inner peace.

"No matter how broken and lost I feel, Blue reminds me I'm never alone," Bob says. "His unwavering loyalty and non-judgmental affection are my rock."

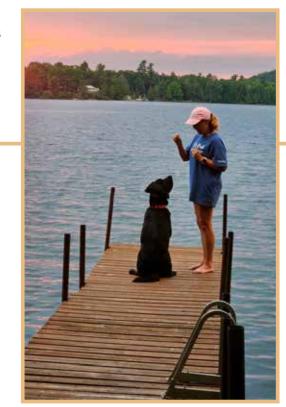
Bob rebuilt his life, hope, and sense of purpose on this faithful dog's sturdy shoulders. It's the beauty of the human-canine bond: no words are needed, as Blue communicates with his heart.

"He sees past my darkness and finds the person still inside," Bob adds. "He's the living embodiment of light piercing the void, showing that redemption is possible if I reach out a hand."

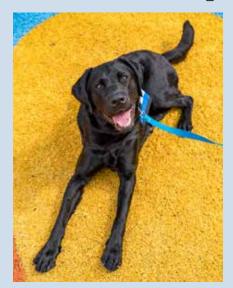
Cheryl Kreutter & Steve Gold Star Family Dog

MATCHED 2022

"While we will never get over the loss of our son, our Gold Star Family Dog, Steve, has taught us that joy is allowed to exist with grief. I know our son would've loved this dog."



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