



**SMOKY MOUNTAIN
SERVICE DOGS**

SERVING WOUNDED VETERANS

SERVING WOUNDED VETERANS: IT TAKES A VILLAGE



Air Force Veteran Billy,
with Service Dog, Lucy.

2017



*Honored
Recipient*

PG 3: GIVING VETERANS
AND THEIR FAMILIES A
FIGHTING CHANCE
The Toll On Families
Following A Traumatic Injury





OUR MISSION

To Enhance the Physical and Psychological Quality Of Life for Veterans with Disabilities by Providing Custom-Trained, Mobility-Assistance Service Dogs (at no cost to the veteran)

Marine Veteran Bradley,
with Service Dog, Bella.



Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These are the inalienable rights that we enjoy as citizens of the United States—and that the brave men and women of our military fearlessly defend. For those veterans who have fought for our freedom and suffered debilitating injuries in the line of duty, Smoky Mountain Service Dogs (SMSD) stands ready to give back.

Founded in 2011, SMSD provides custom-trained, mobility-assistance service dogs to severely wounded veterans—primarily those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We're proud to provide service dogs to America's wounded warriors *at no cost* to the veteran. In fact, we are the only organization headquartered in the State of Tennessee that offers this service free of charge. We do that by working hard to maintain costs while providing operational transparency.

SMSD currently employs three professional trainers and has *no paid administrative staff*. In fact, approximately 97 cents out of every dollar we receive is used directly for the acquisition, care, training and placement of service dogs.

Our team is committed to a shared vision of improving the lives of our veterans with disabilities. Working under the supervision of our professional trainers, we have more than 100 dedicated volunteers who serve as puppy raisers, puppy socializers, and respite foster families. In addition, volunteers mow the 10-acre kennel property, groom dogs, write grants, handle community events and keep the books. Lastly, we have many businesses that provide their services pro-bono for things such as legal counsel, marketing and promotional materials, etc.

These combined efforts speak volumes about the importance of the work that we do at SMSD. Every one of our recipients has reported a dramatic improvement in their quality of life. You'll find some of their inspirational stories in this publication, on our website at www.smokymountain servicedogs.org and on our Facebook page.

ALL SMSD PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS ARE
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SMSD has been awarded gold-star accreditation by Assistance Dogs International. This validates that the facilities and operation of the SMSD program meets or exceeds ADI standards.

GIVING VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES A FIGHTING CHANCE

The Toll on Families Following Traumatic Injury



U.S. Army Specialist Jason,
With Smoky Mountain Service Dog, Freedom

Jason's story is all too familiar. The 9/11 attacks took place while he was a junior in high school. As military recruiters made routine visits to high schools across the nation, patriotic young Americans like Jason were determined to enlist. "I felt it was my job to do something for my country," Jason says.

Three months into a tour of duty in Iraq, and just two weeks shy of his 20th birthday, Jason Ehrhart's Humvee took a direct hit from two anti-tank mines. Propelled from the turret, Jason sustained injuries so severe that upon his return stateside, he was considered to be the most seriously wounded soldier in Maryland.

"I remember the blast ... until I blacked out," Jason said. "Then, nothing." That was because of a traumatic brain

injury (TBI) that put Jason into a coma for three months. His parents, Pam and Mike, sat at his bedside every long day. "When we saw him the first time, it was pretty shocking," Mike recalled. "I close my eyes and I can still see it."

"I felt it was my job to do something for my country."

U.S. Army Specialist Jason

Jason's parents clung to the hope that when he did come out of the coma they were going to get Jason back. "It turns out, we didn't get Jason," Mike said, sadly. "He's not what he was. He's lost a lot."

After surviving nearly 40 surgeries and skin grafts, Jason was still so severely injured that his parents were told that it would be best if they left him permanently in the Veterans Administration hospital. They took a tour of the facility and ended up in the lunchroom. There they saw

Continued ...

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a bunch of “old guys, 75 to 80 years old, sitting around in wheelchairs.” It was heartbreaking to think of Jason spending the rest of his life there, so they did the only other thing they could do—bring him home and care for him themselves.

For more than 11 years Jason’s parents have done just that—24 hours a day. They also hired a physical therapist who comes to their home to work with Jason for an hour each day, although they were understandably frustrated that the cost was not covered by the Veterans Administration.

Mike spoke openly about the tremendous life changes he and his wife have experienced as full-time caregivers. “Like many parents of young, wounded veterans, we had no idea where to start when our son came home. It was evident that he would need full time care.” Mike and Pam, along with parents of other wounded veterans, successfully lobbied Congress to pass the Caregiver Act, which authorizes the Veterans Administration to provide financial assistance to full-time veteran caregivers.

Then, while attending a Wounded Warrior Project event, the family met Air Force Veteran Chad, who had a Smoky Mountain Service Dog, Brice. The Estes family was so impressed with Brice that they reached out and spoke with Suzy Kitchens, SMSD’s Veteran’s Family Liaison, who assisted the family through the application process.

Shortly after receiving his dog, Freedom, Jason’s mother said, “Not only did Freedom exceed any expectations, but Jason’s ability to learn and take responsibility was also amazing and rewarding.”

Freedom has taken Jason’s doctors’ expectations to a whole new level. His neuropsychiatrist, for one, was extremely impressed with Jason’s progress and his enthusiasm about Freedom. That doctor now uses Jason’s case in his lectures and presentations about how the brain can repair itself more than previously thought.

“Speaking as a mother, I have felt comfortable leaving Jason alone for a couple of hours knowing that Freedom is with him,” Pam said. “That alone has made a huge difference. Jason now argues about going out with us, preferring to be home alone. His sense of independence and responsibility has grown in a very short time.”

Looking ahead, there is every hope that Jason will continue to make strides to be the best that he can be with his new “battle buddy” Freedom. 🐾

To learn more about other veterans like Jason, and to make a donation or see how you can get involved, please visit www.smokymountain servicedogs.org



Freedom



Jason’s first boat ride along with his appropriately named service dog, Freedom



Jason, Freedom and family at graduation with the team from SMSD



Jason and Freedom at the Passing of the Leash Ceremony

Wounded EOD Specialist Returns to Life and Nature with Help of Service Dog

For two decades, Trevor, a now retired Army First Sergeant, enjoyed his job as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) technician. "It was a unique job. Every day the mission was different, and every day you had to use your brain and learn something new," he said. He enjoyed working with other EOD techs, who he found to be highly motivated and skilled.

Stateside, EOD techs provide support with explosives to everyone from county sheriffs to the FBI. But Trevor also served in major hot spots, including Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan.



Smoky Mountain Service Dog Gauge comforts Trevor as he prepares for surgery.

In 2009, while deployed in Afghanistan, he received a career-ending injury when he rushed to help a young soldier who had set off an accidental detonation. A second detonation severely wounded his abdomen, and Trevor underwent two and a half years of medical treatment before he could be medically retired. Peterson, who strives to see the positive in everything, just says "the good thing is no one else was injured. None of my soldiers were hurt."

However, the injury changed his life. Surgeons had to remove his abdominal muscles, and coupled with a previous back injury, that affected his balance and mobility. The avid outdoorsman can no longer hunt, hike mountains or wade in trout streams. He also has problems with vision,

especially at night, and with depth perception. Even now, nine years after his injury, he visits doctors weekly.

For years, Trevor's doctors recommended he apply for a service dog, and for years he resisted. Finally, at his wife Laura's insistence, he applied to a Texas organization that had a dog for an EOD tech (the family of an EOD tech killed in action donated funds for the dog's training with the stipulation the dog go to an EOD tech). The dog didn't have the right training for Trevor's needs, but the organization forwarded his information to Smoky Mountain Service Dogs (SMSD), which is located not far from Trevor's home in Sharps Chapel, Tennessee.

Trevor was surprised when Suzy Kitchens, family liaison for SMSD, told him he was a good candidate, and even more surprised when she matched him with a dog just two months later.

Gauge, a Labrador retriever, has been Trevor's service dog for eight months and "I can't imagine life without him," Trevor said. Gauge helps with his mobility and vision issues in myriad ways, such as turning on the lights when Trevor moves around the house at night. On wet concrete or on steps, Gauge stays close by to help with balance and stability.

***"He's done wonders for me
... He takes care of me."***

Trevor

"I get sore by the end of the day, and he can pull my shoes and socks off, put the socks in the basket and the shoes by the door. He can grab my cane, the remote if I drop it, or the phone if it's ringing," Trevor added. "He's done wonders for me. My anxiety level being out in public is lower. He takes care of me."

Trevor credits Laura with being the strength behind everything, noting she gave up her career to care for him. These days, Laura and Gauge "tag team" him, he joked.

With the dog, Trevor is able to return to the outdoors he loves so much. "Gauge and I take road trips, 'nature-watching adventures' Laura calls them. The peace of mind he gives Laura and me when I'm traveling is unbelievable, even if it's only a few hours by vehicle. I can't go hunting, but it's about being outside and being with friends," he said. "Gauge gives me a lot of confidence, and he gives Laura that confidence too. Smoky Mountain Service Dogs is a great organization that's really making a difference in people's lives." 🐾

Heroes Helping Heroes

US Air Force Colonel has New Wing Man with Service Dog Vanner



US Air Force Colonel Shawn with Service Dog, Vanner.

US Air Force Veteran Shawn wanted to be a Thunderbirds pilot since he was 10. After becoming a distinguished graduate from the prestigious Air Force Academy with three

advanced degrees, he became a fighter pilot and ultimately a strategic analyst under the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon.

Shawn flew more than 400 hours of combat missions in Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Shawn served as an F15E Strike Eagle pilot, operations officer, commander for the 494th Fighter Squadron “Panthers”, and the Vice commander of Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, NC. He also achieved his childhood dream by becoming first the Opposing Solo and then the Lead Solo pilot in the elite Air Force Thunderbird Demonstration team.

In 2014, when doctors diagnosed Shawn with a cerebral aneurysm, he retired from the military after 24 years of service. Four days before scheduled surgery, the aneurysm ruptured.

Although recovery continues, Shawn now has his new wing man, SMSD Mobility Assistance Service Dog, Vanner, at his side. Vanner’s role is to help Shawn, who is completely wheelchair bound, in his toughest battle yet—to improve his ability to verbalize and obtain better use of his arms and legs.

Karen, Shawn’s mother and full-time caregiver reports, “Vanner and Shawn have adapted well to each

other. Vanner knows that his job is to try to be Shawn’s friend and to try to both push him to excel during therapy, while at the same time calm him in times of stress. When Shawn is sitting in his wheelchair, Vanner brings his toys to Shawn, puts his head in Shawn’s lap, and sits by his side. He is such an incredible dog!” 🐾

Peace of Mind, Ease of Mobility: Service Dog Thor Delivers



US Army Sergeant First Class Justin with Service Dog, Thor.

Justin joined the Army in 2001 and served nearly 12 years. In his 12 years of service, Justin was deployed twice to Afghanistan and twice to Iraq. He spent

seven years as a combat infantryman and the last three and a half years as a civil affairs officer, working directly with Afghan citizens and local officers to solve difficult problems.

Serving his country took a toll on Justin, both physically and mentally. He’d injured his knee in airborne training, and despite several surgeries his mobility was severely limited.

He had also begun showing signs of PTSD, including loss of memory, anger, and nightmare issues. Justin, a Sergeant First Class, was medically retired in April of 2013.

SMSD matched Justin with a Golden Lab named Thor. It was a perfect match for both veteran and canine. “He helps me with my mobility, but he has also made a big improvement in the mental aspect. He’s my battle buddy—a friend who doesn’t judge. He’s very loyal and loving,” said Justin.

“Smoky Mountain Service Dogs is greatly improving the lives of veterans,” he added. “I consider them to be part of my extended family, as they have helped me and my family so much.” 🐾

Service Dog Aids Wounded Veteran with Mobility, Tasks and PTSD



US Air Force/Special Ops/Pararescue Veteran Daniel with Service Dog, Stryker.

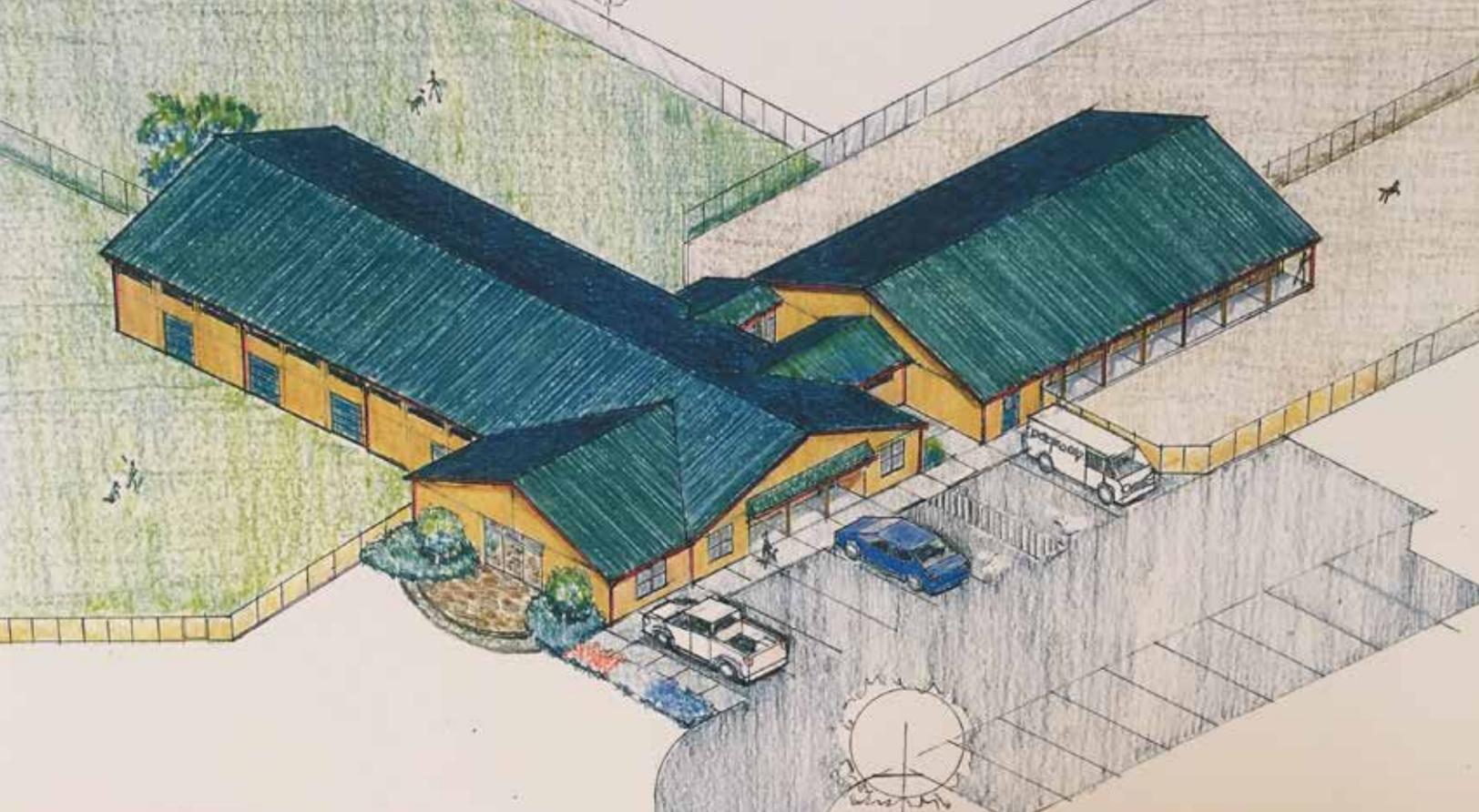
As a pararescue/paramedic, Daniel served extensively in combat roles, including tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and he participated in over 60 rescues during his term of service. Daniel suffered multiple injuries during combat

including being struck in the shoulder by an enemy sniper. He also had a wall blown on top of him by either a mortar or improvised explosive device that crushed his leg and caused a traumatic brain injury, along with facial and other injuries.

In 2015, Daniel was paired with SMSD Mobility Assistance Dog Stryker.

Today, Daniel says, “I couldn’t live without my Stryker. He is always picking stuff up for me, brings me my shoes, cane, drinks from the fridge. He helps provide balance and stability when I walk. He has also helped reduce my PTSD episodes and I am sleeping a lot better at night.

Daniel reports that Stryker helps take his mind off things too. “Somehow he can just sense when I am going into a bad place. He has completely changed my life and helped a lot with my marriage.” 🐾



SMSD Veteran/Canine Training Center Update

SMSD is so Blessed to have not only wonderful support from the greater Knoxville area but also around the country.

Wayne and Deby Kyle (parents of Chris Kyle, the American Sniper), representing the American Valor Foundation, presented SMSD with a check for \$225,000 in October, 2017 to kick off the “More Wags for Warriors” facility campaign. Since that time, many other foundations, businesses, and individual donors have stepped up, resulting in over \$500,000 of donations towards the construction of the SMSD Veteran/Canine Training Center.

The new center will have an 18 dog kennel, feeding area, grooming area, medical exam area, conference room but most importantly a 3500 square foot Veteran/Canine Training area. Although the campaign is ongoing, ground breaking is just around the corner and construction should be completed late 2019. The new facility will allow SMSD to approximately double the number of severely wounded veterans and families that can be served. 🐾



(Left to right): Deby and Wayne Kyle with Amy and Jeff Kyle; SMSD founders Suzy and Mike Kitchens; Air Force Veteran and service dog recipient Billy with his wife Krista and Billy's service dog Lucy; and (front row) Debbie and Wayne's granddaughters.



**SMOKY MOUNTAIN
SERVICE DOGS**

SERVING WOUNDED VETERANS

110 Tooweka Circle, Loudon, TN 37774

Phone: (865) 408-3070

www.smokymountain servicedogs.org

SMSD provides mobility assistance service dogs for veterans with physical and psychological disabilities at NO COST to the veteran.

It takes two years and \$22,000 to train one service dog.

Service dogs receive approximately 1,800 hours of professional training by SMSD trainers and supervised volunteers, fosters and puppy raisers.

SMSD is accredited by Assistance Dogs International and is the *only* accredited organization headquartered in Tennessee.

SMSD serves a 350-mile radius of Knoxville within a 7-state area.

SMSD has no paid administrative staff. The organization has over 100 community volunteers who assist in all aspects of the operation.

Approximately 97 cents of each donated dollar goes directly to the care and training of SMSD canines and the wounded veterans SMSD serves.

2017



*Honored
Recipient*

We can't do it without you! Can you help us give back to those who have sacrificed so much? Please visit www.smokymountain servicedogs.org today to **DONATE** or **VOLUNTEER**.