Volunteer Spotlight

This edition we are shining the spotlight on three of our volunteers whose roles are vital to our mission, but are largely unknown. Read on to meet these unsung heros.

GAYLE BOOTH - bookkeeper

Gayle has been on board with SMSD since the very beginning, keeping our books and records straight. She first heard about the idea of a Smoky Mountain Service Dogs organization because she is a close neighbor of co-founders Mike and Suzy Kitchens. She had been working as an accountant in the corporate world and then as an accountant or bookkeeper for small businesses.

Gayle is mostly retired now but continues to be our volunteer bookkeeper because she loves this organization and is inspired by how many people have a commitment to our mission. Her role has grown along with the organization over the years and we appreciate all of her help along the way.

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As we all head into this New Year of 2022, let us remember that so many of our military members will have spent another year away from their loved ones.

Prayer for Our Military: Lord, hold our troops in your loving hands. Protect them as they protect us. Bless them and their families for the selfless acts they perform for us in our time of need.

2021 has been a year of many blessings for our SMSD family and those we serve. To name just a few:

In December of 2020, the Andy Quattlebaum and Blackwell Family Foundations became a Sustaining Partner for SMSD as they made a significant donation and endowment that will help ensure the long-term viability of our mission in honor of their son Andy. You may have noticed the wonderful memorial sign at our training center honoring the memory of Andy Quattlebaum, the son of Don and Hayden Quattlebaum, who lost his life at the age of 22. Andy also had a prized yellow Labrador named Oak, which is why we have a future SMSD by the same name currently in training.

We were able to place seven wonderful canines with deserving Veterans this year. Cedric with SMSD Beau, Ray with SMSD Hondo, Timmy with SMSD Jewel, Wendell with SMSD Duncan, Benny with SMSD Blaze, Russell with SMSD Tango, and Eric with SMSD Duke. In addition, we have several wonderful candidates and excellent canines ready for placement in 2022.

Going into 2022 and beyond, our work will begin to increase significantly as we will begin to increase the number of recertifications required each year and also begin to replace canines that will be retired after serving their veterans for many years, in addition to new placements.

Through the efforts of so many, we were able to obtain 1,042 pre-orders for our Specialty License Plates, which will hopefully be available in the next few months.

Our staff has spent the first full year in your new SMSD Veteran/Canine Training Center. The facility is world class and was recognized as such by Dr. Sally Irvin of Assistance Dogs International when she visited our facility in late 2020 as a part of our reaccreditation.

We still have some additional landscaping to do in the spring but the Veteran/Canine Training Center project is essentially complete. We have begun to look at the possibility of replacing the manufactured home as it is now 30 years old. In addition to the home, we are also looking at additional storage capacity on the property.

Your Board of Directors has also had a very busy year. Larry Denney and Bill Taylor rotated off at the first of the year and we added Chris Sanders and Chuck Stewart. Going into 2022, Deb Sciarretta and Carla Werner have rotated off and we have added Carla Navas and Tom Bradley. Officer elections were held in November and Mike Kitchens will serve as Chair, Romano Sims as Vice-Chair, Pat Chappell as Secretary, and Steve Rieth as Treasurer. Board members at large are Suzy Kitchens, Judy Handley, Laurie Birt, Carla Navas, John Fearn, Chuck Stewart, Chris Sanders and Tom Bradley. It is indeed my honor to work with such dedicated professionals who are so committed to serving our Veterans through the mission of SMSD. The same is true of all 180-190 volunteers who are also such a critical part of the team. Thanks and appreciation to all.

Although Covid prevented us from doing our annual Night for Patriots gala in 2021, the 2021 Challenge Golf event was sold out and highly successful. We have scheduled October 1, 2022, for our Night for Patriots event so mark your calendars.

In closing, on behalf of everyone at SMSD and those we serve, Happy Holidays. God Bless You and God Bless America.

Mike Kitchens
Breeder Spotlight

Hero Labradors is a non-profit organization located in Decatur, Texas. The mission of Hero Labradors is to provide high quality, purpose-bred puppies to service dog training programs for veterans and first responders. Smoky Mountain Service Dogs began its partnership with Hero Labradors in late 2018. Since that time, Hero Labradors has donated 15 puppies to be trained as future mobility assistance service dogs. Some of these are currently serving veterans while the others continue their training. Hero Labradors is recognized as an AKC responsible breeder. To learn more about Hero Labradors and the incredible work that they do, please visit www.herolabradors.org and follow their social media pages.

Heather Wilkerson

Puppy Press News

Turn on your sound, sit back and Click HERE to meet the new kids on the block.

River
Sam
Dakota

A lot of movement in the kennel this quarter. Puppies Oak, Boone and Bentley moved into the kennel to begin their advanced skills. This can be a tough transition from the familiarity of their puppy raisers homes into the kennel where there is a whole new routine and lots of things to learn. They work with the trainers Monday through Friday, have outings with socializers a couple times during the week and then spend weekends with a weekend respite provider. They get exposed to a lot of new environments and new handlers.

We also had three dogs move from the kennel into advanced foster homes. Grizzly, Jazz and Jumper have all met the criteria needed to make this change. They meet new handlers and learn to settle into a new household. They will attend weekly lessons at the kennel and also have a day when they are dropped off so they can work with the trainers to improve their skills and stay prepared for their eventual match.

Dogs of all ages continue to work on new skills and handle new environments throughout their training.

Congratulations to new bride Cassie!!
Our 47th placement! Army Combat Medic Russell and SMSD Tango. Watch the training camp video here and the Passing of the Leash video here.

Please share our joy in graduating two new teams in this quarter!

Our 48th team - Air Force veteran Eric and SMSD Duke. You can view the training camp video here and the Passing of the Leash video here.

SMSDs on Duty*

SMSD Tucker

SMSD Crockett mailing letter to Santa

SMSD Dagger overseeing farm operations.

SMSD Chance after "Turkeypocalypse"

Academy Sports presented several of our recipients with a generous shopping spree.

*Note to recipients: Send pics of your dogs on duty - we'd love to feature more.
laurie.b@smokymountainservicedogs.org
Deb Sciaretta and Carla Werner have recently rotated off the board but they have both agreed to stay on as volunteers on the applications team (Carla) and as puppy raiser coordinator (Deb). Thank you!! They were each awarded a plaque as a token of appreciation for their many years of service to SMSD.

We welcome Carla Navas to the board. Carla will be taking on the role as Volunteer Coordinator. She brings a lot of energy and new ideas for enhancing the experience of all volunteers and welcomes your comments and suggestions (carla.n@smokymountainservicedogs.org). Carla has served in many roles since becoming a volunteer just 2.5 years ago. She has been a co-puppy raiser, canine transporter, weekend kennel care and member of the volunteer coordinator team. Please give her a warm welcome!

Our newest board member is Tom Bradley. He is a recent resident, having moved to Tellico Village from Northern Virginia in February of this year. Tom is an Air Force veteran and owner of three dogs, so of course it was a natural fit! He is looking forward to diving in and helping with the mission of SMSD. Tom first learned about our organization while attending a meeting of the New Villagers Club of Tellico Village and was particularly impressed when hearing over 96% of each dollar goes directly to the care and training of our dogs. Welcome aboard, Tom!
Our volunteers are at the core of our business model for SMSD. We couldn’t do what we do without all of your help and dedication to our mission. Our heartfelt thanks and appreciation go out to each and every one of you. Thank you. We appreciate you and are honored by your service.

Welcome New 4TH Q 2021 Volunteers:

Tim & Vanessa Hallihan - Respite
Toni & Patty Jazayeri - Respite
Robert Martin - Puppy Raiser/Respite

FIVE years of volunteer service!

Joel and Andee Raker - Foster
Dick and Jane Salmon - Respite

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Barb McVeety
Grant Writer

Barb has been a volunteer with us since 2015. She was first recruited by our previous grant writer, Sue Newman, when they met at a dog park. Although she had no previous experience in writing grants, Sue showed her the ropes and Barb was able to take over when Sue moved away. The attention to detail she brought to her previous job with the fire department as an EMT has served her well in her new role. The ability to quickly grasp new procedures and learn different software is especially important in handling the grants from the federal government. She works closely with Mike Kitchens in making sure the paperwork is completed in a timely and accurate manner. This is a vital role within our organization and we thank you for your dedication to our mission.

Donald Caldwell
Sketch Artist

If you have been to any of the Passing of the Leash ceremonies since he joined us in 2019, you would have seen the wonderful sketches he does that we present to the puppy raiser and the advanced foster. He first became acquainted with SMSD through a puppy raiser who brought her puppy to church. He did a sketch of that puppy and was then asked if he could create a puppy sketch and an adult sketch for each of our graduating dogs. Don is married to Kathy, a freelance muralist whom he credits for “showing him the ropes.” He worked primarily in acrylics but took up sketching about six years ago. Don is currently semi-retired and works as a care pastor in Farragut. They plan to stay in East Tennessee and we are very grateful for that!

Keep up with all the latest news - follow us on all the social media platforms. Click on any of the icons below to go directly to our page.

Send newsletter comments and suggestions to
laurie.b@smokymountainservicedogs.org

And now we wait. Our part of the process is finished and we are now waiting for the State of Tennessee to start shipping. Many thanks to everyone who ordered.

Unfortunately, the new design of Tennessee’s standard license design has caused a delay in all specialized plates. We will update you on Facebook when they start shipping. Soon, we hope.