

*Something to Howl About*

**JANUARY 2024**

# ***PATRIOT PUPPY PRESS***



## ***This Issue***

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## **A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR**

2023 was another wonderful year for SMSD, thanks to the efforts of our wonderful staff and our many volunteers, led by our volunteer board of directors. As we move into 2024 and beyond, SMSD is well positioned to continue the successful pursuit of our mission to serve wounded Veterans and First Responders. There were many, many highlights during the year and I would like to focus on just a couple.

### **CREDIBILITY**

SMSD continues to increase its national credibility in a most wonderful way as evidenced by our selection as one of a few recipients of a research grant funded by the Department of Defense and administered by the Uniformed University of Health Sciences located in Bethesda, MD. The goal of the grant is to work with the University of California, Long Beach, and others for the purpose of establishing prototype standards for mobility assistance service dogs for wounded Veterans. Our board member Joe Tedesco and Canine Program Manager Heather Wilkerson have worked diligently as key members of the research team. Joe and Heather will be traveling to Bethesda, MD in July as the work concludes with a focus group meeting.

### **TEAMWORK**

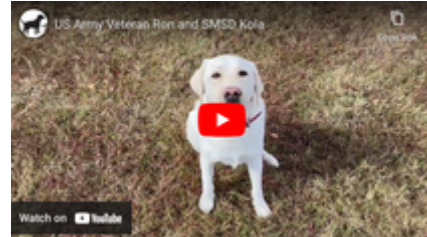
Don't mess with Heather. "Winter Storm Heather" gave us a punch in mid-January resulting in the necessary closing of our Kennel/Training Center for several days. Our team of trainers, along with our wonderful dog handler volunteers, worked diligently to ensure the safety of each other and our wonderful canines, allowing us to get all dogs out to loving homes for an extended period. Fairview Road is a beautiful country drive normally but was slow to clear of snow/ice. A special thanks to Darrell Wilkerson for looking after our facility during this difficult time. As I write this, Darrell is transporting dog food/treats out to US 321 for dog handlers. Actually I think Darrell enjoys jumping on the 4-wheel drive Mule and playing in the snow. Just another great example of the incredible TEAMWORK that is demonstrated each and every day by all of SMSD folks. Thank you, thank you, it is such an HONOR to be part of such a dedicated and capable team.

*Mike Hitchens*

# RECIPIENT NEWS



Passing of the Leash for US Army Veteran  
Ron and SMSD Kola October 27, 2023



Click above or copy and paste this link:  
**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nQTPcxzL30>**  
to watch the Training Camp Video put together  
by our very talented trainers!

We passed the leash to US Army  
Veteran Lt. Col. Gregory and SMSD  
Henley Jan 12, 2024



<https://youtu.be/iXhOJJYBoRA>



<https://youtube.com/watch?v=HFxCKKr9kw4&t=50s>



Greg and SMSD Henley with Brad  
and Jumper. Brad named Henley  
after the Army Medic who saved  
his life.

Charley Jordan and SMSD Dagger meet  
Governor Lee and others!



And Brad and SMSD Jumper  
decide to run for office! 😊



# KENNEL NEWS

I would like to take a moment to wish all of you Happy New Year!

This new year is coming with a few minor changes to our program staff responsibilities and a new employee! As Cassie phased out of her part-time roll at the end of 2023, Melissa Marti graciously accepted a full time trainer position within our training program. We are excited to have Melissa's commitment and talent complementing our team. As our number of service dog team placements have increased, there is a need to expand our client services and support. I will be shifting more of my time and effort toward the client service needs and have officially passed the torch of supervision for dogs in training to Lead Trainer Susan Randall. Susan will be mentoring the staff trainers, conducting the canine behavioral and performance training assessments, developing the lesson plans for our volunteer classes and clients receiving dogs, assisting the application team with dog pairings, and conducting client training sessions. I will continue to maintain breeder relations, manage dog procurement, maintain management of all program operations, ensure program compliance, develop new program curriculum and continuing education opportunities for staff, volunteers and clients. I will continue to conduct annual service dog team interviews and recertification of their required public access testing with assistance from the application team members.

Laura Porter will continue to serve as the training liaison for the UT student socializer program. She will continue to instruct client teams and fosters as well as maintain a pipeline of dogs in training.

Miranda Yates will manage the respite dog assignments, teach new volunteer lessons, assist with some administrative tasks such as enhancing educational materials and assisting Heather with the client services. Miranda will also maintain a small pipeline of dogs in training and provide instruction for those fosters and clients assigned to them.

Some of the projects I hope to accomplish during the first quarter of 2024 are to improve the quality of our online classes and schedule continuing education for our staff and recipients.

As I reflect on all the growth over the years spent since the inception of SMSD, I continue to be amazed and humbled. We have such an amazing team of staff trainers and volunteers who continue to produce excellent service dog candidates. I'm grateful for them but also grateful to all of our board members, application team, community events team, facility team, canine transport team, volunteer coordinators and all those who work tirelessly behind the scenes to sew capes for our dogs, balance our books and take great photographs! What a journey! I'm excited and motivated now more than ever moving into 2024.

*Heather Wilkerson*

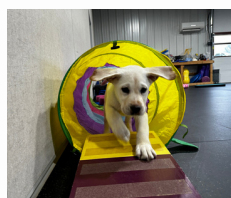
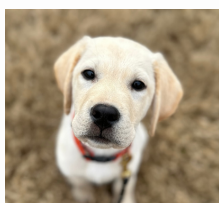


## Congratulations!

Laura Porter received her CCFT certificate from UT and is officially now a Certified Canine Fitness Trainer! Let's all congratulate Laura on this accomplishment.

Melissa Marti has now been enrolled in this course and we hope to get her through this rigorous course by the end of the 3rd quarter of 2024.

**Welcome** new puppies - L-R: Oak II, Clancey, Jerry, Dusty



In addition to the four new puppies who arrived this month, we are expecting two Golden Retrievers in February!



## New Board Member Jim Caughorn



Jim is President/Owner of Graphic Creations in Knoxville, TN., a family owned business since 1987. A graduate of the University of Tennessee with his Bachelor of Science degree, Jim is very active giving back to his community, serving on the Board of Directors of the Boys and Girls Club of the Tennessee Valley. Jim also serves as President of the Knoxville Business Association Group. He looks forward to playing a key role in the strategic development of SMSD and is well qualified to assist in a number of functional areas including, Finance, Special Events, Fundraising, Marketing, Community outreach and networking. As a Sustaining Partner, Graphic Creations will also assist SMSD on social media presence./development.

A Year in Review  
trainers took pictures  
almost every day in  
2023. Take a look  
here to see them all!



<https://www.facebook.com/smokymountain servicedogs/videos/253867047566790>

## ***WHAT'S IN A NAME???***

We thought you'd like to hear about how our dogs get their names. This will be a regular feature so feel free to ask about some of your favorites so we can include them in a future issue.

This month we tell the naming story for two of our dogs Patriot sponsored by long-time friend and supporter, Ali Swofford of Prosperity Partners Wealth Management, LLC. We thank you for your belief in our mission! Hear in her words how she came to select these names.



### ***Honor***

Honor, was named in Honor of Terry Wampler a close friend and Douglas Lake neighbor who was a great American and proud Vietnam Veteran. He died on Christmas Eve 2021 very unexpectedly following surgery after a fall. Honor was born shortly before Terry died and I felt Terry's patriotism and love for his family and friends could be carried forward through the wonderful work Honor will accomplish.



Terry Wampler

### ***Bailey***

Another one of my lake neighbors (lived right next door to Terry) named Jim Hendrickson was killed this spring in an automobile accident in California. He had a favorite dog, Bailey, and a best friend, Charlie Bailey, so in honor of Jim's service to his country, contributions to NASA, and great friendship to all who knew him, another pup from the same kennel as Honor arrived November 19th and was named Bailey in honor of Jim. I'm excited to meet Bailey and watch him follow Honor's footsteps.

I'm proud to be able to pay tribute to my friends through the great work you and everyone at Smoky Mountain Service Dogs provide.

Ali Swofford



Send comments, suggestions and critiques to [Laurie.B@smokymountain servicedogs.org](mailto:Laurie.B@smokymountain servicedogs.org)

# NEWS FROM YOUR VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR TEAM

## *Message from Carla Navas, SMSD Volunteer Director*



As we look back on 2023 we have much to be thankful for. We placed 8 SMSD dogs - 5 with Veterans and 3 as Facility Dogs. We have received excellent feedback on these dogs value to their recipients.

We have a record number of Respite and Transporters who are vital to our mission. Of course, we are always in need of more puppy raisers. In addition, we have numerous volunteers, sponsors, donors, and supporters that “keep the wheels on the bus” and keep us moving forward. We’ve added an additional full-time trainer to our already stellar training team which ensures that both our dogs and our volunteers receive the excellent instruction needed to turn out the high quality service dogs that we’ve become known for.

All this to say that it is only possible because of the generosity and commitment of each of you and for that we are deeply grateful.

We wish you all the best in the coming year. **Thank you!**

## **Welcome 4Q New SMSD Volunteers!**

Carly Albert, UT Socializer  
Elizabeth Hardwick, Respite  
Lisa Lawson, Puppy Raiser  
Jim Lyons, Respite & Transport  
Jennie Miller, Respite  
Cortney Peugot, Puppy Raiser  
Kelly Reed, Puppy Raiser  
Carter Ross, UT Socializer  
Ellen Shertzer, Puppy Raiser  
Diane Thompson, Puppy Raiser



# NEWS FROM YOUR VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR TEAM

## Spotlight on SMSD Volunteer Puppy Raisers

### ***Message from Deb Sciarretta, SMSD Volunteer Puppy Coordinator***

Without a doubt, our Puppy Raisers have one of the toughest jobs in the SMSD organization. I think we all understand the level of commitment it takes as well as the never ending patience required to raise our puppies according to SMSD standards. Please meet our current group of heroes!

#### Gary Kaplan - Raised Silas and is currently raising Bailey

The challenge: You have one year. There is an abundance of friendly help from trainers and volunteers. A newborn puppy sporting 4 legs and a tail to do your very best with. Ready, set, Go!

#### Annalise Adams, - Raised Hank and is currently raising Wrigley

My favorite part of puppy raising is working with and being challenged by his trainer Susan!!

#### Jessica & David Hartman - Raising Noble

We have been Puppy Raising Noble since August of 2023. It has been an honor to be a part of his story and his journey. We have learned so much about the importance of every aspect of the training program and value the Mission of Smoky Mountain Service Dogs!

#### Grace Nystrom - UT Student raising JoJo on Campus

Working with JoJo has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life! Seeing her grow every day has been inspiring and I cannot wait to see the good she does in the future!

#### Nancy Hully - Raised Colt and is currently raising Kip

The best part of puppy raising is watching these cute little pups explore the world and learn so quickly! I am so grateful for the knowledge and support of the SMSD training staff. Being a puppy raiser has been a very rewarding experience.

#### Haylee Schwerdt - Has raised 6 puppies and is currently raising River II

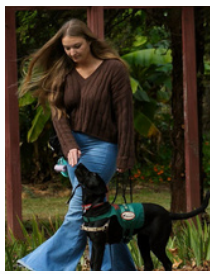
Being an SMSD puppy raiser for many years, it is always fun to experience new places with the puppies and see how they react and explore!



Gary with Bailey



Annalise with Wrigley



Grace with JoJo



Nancy with Kip



Haylee with River II

### **Huge Thanks to the following new Puppy Raisers who will be receiving January Puppies:**

Diane Thompson  
Lisa Lawson  
Judy & Tim Kowal  
Kelly Reedy/Courtney Peugeot

### **And to our stalwarts who always help us out when we're in a bind:**

Ginger & Mark Stone  
Debbie & Dan Lathrop  
The Raker Family  
Renee King

Millhouse Family  
Carole & Bob Martin  
Melissa Marti  
Carla Navas



# NEWS FROM YOUR VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR TEAM

## **Spotlight on SMSD Volunteer 2023 Advanced Fosters**

SMSD has a progression for the training of our future service dogs. We receive puppies at approximately 8 weeks old and are immediately placed into a volunteer puppy raiser's home who will work closely with the trainers to guide, reinforce, expose to new experiences and of course, love them until they reach a year old.

At one year of age the dogs will be given an extensive examination by our veterinarian they will be neutered and after their recover they move into the kennel where they begin full time advanced training to learn the mobility assistance tasks. While living in the kennel, volunteers assist the training staff with providing weekend respite, environmental and social exposures for our dogs.

When the dogs are approximately 18 months old and pass their final performance and temperament assessment, they will be assigned to a volunteer advanced foster home. The advanced foster is responsible for maintaining all of the dog's task training and applying the skills in both a home and public setting until the dog is paired with a veteran applicant. Generally, dogs are paired to an applicant between the ages of 2-2.5 years.

### **Meet SMSD's 2023 Advanced Foster Volunteers**

#### **Claire Luttrell - Advanced Foster for Seymour in 2023 and 1 previous dog**

Advance fostering has been very fulfilling, I am working with a wonderful dog to get him to the point so that he will be there for someone who really needs him. I do fall in love with the dogs, but knowing that they are going to someone who needs them more than I do makes it easier to give them up.

#### **Barb Spate - Advanced Foster for Peyton & Kola in 2023 and 4 previous dogs**

It is a great experience being an Advanced Foster home knowing I am preparing a dog for a life of service.

#### **Joyce Bartolone - Advanced Foster for Peyton & Henley in 2023 and 2 other dogs previously**

My job as an Advanced Foster is to take the skills taught to the dogs in the kennel and incorporate them into everyday life. If I drop something on the floor, I have the dog pick it up and put it on the counter, or if my phone rings, I let the dog go get it and bring it to me. This aids in the dog's transition into its job of helping its recipient.

#### **Connie Finger - Advanced Foster for Goose in 2023**

I feel so fortunate having fostered Goose, he is an exceptional service dog who really knows his skills and loves using them to assist his handler. His nickname – “Mr. Mayor” – is spot on; everyone loves him. Goose will be a wonderful best friend and helper to his future recipient.



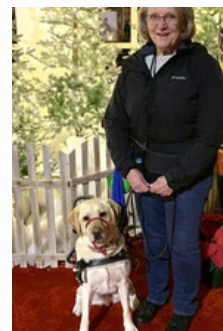
Claire with Seymour



Barb with Kola



Joyce with Henley



Connie with Goose

# NEWS FROM YOUR VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR TEAM

## Spotlight on SMSD Volunteer 2023 Advanced Fosters

### Meet SMSD's 2023 Advanced Foster Volunteers Continued

#### Renee King - Advanced Foster for Aster in 2023 and 1 other dog previously

I have been a puppy raiser and an advanced foster with SMSD for 5 years. It is so rewarding knowing what I'm doing on a daily basis is with the end goal of helping to open the Veteran or first responder's world again. Playing a part of a dog learning a new skill successfully is a growth opportunity that provides unconditional love and loyalty. When I'm in between SMSD puppies/dogs, I feel like something is missing in my life.

#### Jerry & Janiece Francis - Advanced Foster for Stinger in 2023

Advanced fostering is a rewarding opportunity. It allows us to share our lives helping a wonderful dog maintain skills to be used improving life for veterans or first responders.

#### Gale Frana - Advanced Foster for Bentley and 5 other dogs previously

Bentley is my 5th advanced dog with SMSD and was a real love. He loves to work and has soulful eyes!

#### Steve Reith - Advanced Foster for Kola - and 5 other dogs previously

As an advanced foster, you are constantly asked, "How can you give them up?" I reply that it is not easy, but it is so rewarding to see them do what they are trained to do and seeing the difference they make in the life of a deserving veteran. *NOTE - Steve chose the photo below because it shows Kola's loving demeanor.*

#### Debbie Lathrop - Advance Foster for Honor in 2023

Working with Advanced dogs has increased my appreciation of the importance of the fundamentals which are learned during the dogs first 2 years. They are the building blocks for achieving success in learning Advanced Skills.

#### Ginger Stone - Advanced Foster for Triscuit in 2023

Advanced fostering allows us to actively engage in helping our dogs master skills they are trained to provide to each client's specific daily needs. The journey to place a dog with the client begins with puppy raising and ends with the passing of the leash; fostering an advanced dog is one of many highlights in the SMSD mission.



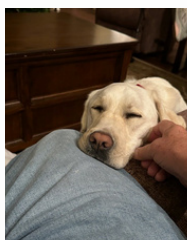
Renee with Aster



Jerry & Janiece with Stinger



Gale with Bentley



Kola with Steve



Debbie with Honor



Ginger with Triscuit