

*Something to Howl About*

*SPRING 2024*

# ***PATRIOT PUPPY PRESS***



***This Issue:***

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***Volunteer News***

***Kibbles and Bits***

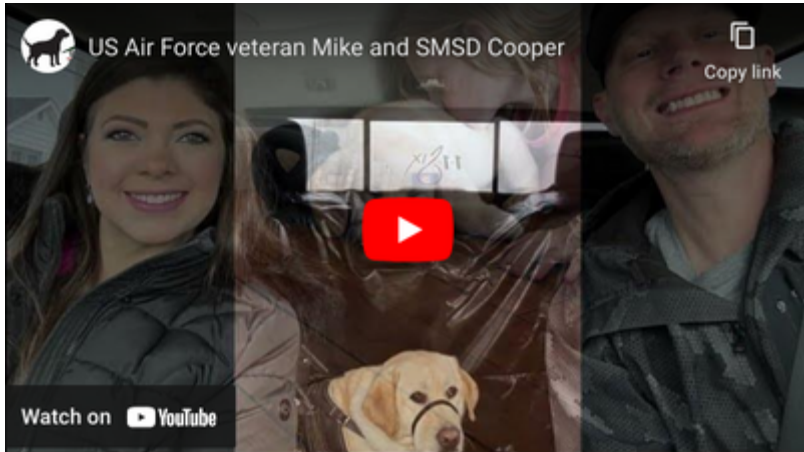
## **THE APPLICATION TEAM:**

This month we wanted to shed some light on the application process our veteran recipients go through. The Application Team is led by Suzy Kitchens, with members Robin Richards, Glennie Browne, Lynne Shea, Jody Butler, Carla Werner, Gale Frana and Marga Hinsley, each contributing to what is a difficult and complex process.

Suzy describes her role and the team as follows:

"I have served as the SMSD Liaison to our applicants since we started SMSD. Today I continue to participate with and oversee the SMSD Application Team. The team works quietly behind the scenes as an extremely vital part of SMSD as they screen and manage clients throughout the entire process. The application process was developed to be able to really get to know the veterans who receive our dogs, to create trust, and to manage expectations of both SMSD and the veteran. The information gathered by the team is shared with the training staff so our trainers know how to manage clients physically and mentally during the hands-on training camp. The application process begins with completion of the preliminary application and ends with the Passing of the Leash ceremony. The application team assists Heather Wilkerson, our Canine Program Manager, by sharing pertinent information and conducting annual progress interviews with each recipient until the service dog is retired.

# RECIPIENT NEWS



March 13, 2024 - What a great day!  
Passing of the Leash Ceremony  
US Air Force Veteran Mike and  
SMSD Cooper



SMSD Aster making sure his Change of Address is properly filed.

## ***SMSDs At Work***



SMSD Dagger's 3rd Birthday  
(SMSDs get their birthday off)

Jumper relaxing after: 27  
Days, 4866.2 Miles, 7 States,  
9 Campgrounds. Vacations  
are exhausting!



SMSD Hondo visiting US  
Capital along with  
Dawnie

This quarter I would like to educate our readers about the Smoky Mountain Service Dogs accrediting institution which is Assistance Dogs International (ADI). Smoky Mountain Service Dogs became a candidate for membership with ADI in 2013 and obtained full membership after completing the rigorous process to become an internationally accredited member in 2015. Smoky Mountain Service Dogs has continued its membership as an ADI accredited organization since.

Assistance Dogs International is the global authority in the service dog industry. (ADI) is a worldwide coalition of non-profit programs that train and place Assistance Dogs. Founded in 1986 from a group of seven small programs, ADI has become the leading authority in the Assistance Dog industry.

Members pay annual dues, undergo routine audits and site assessments and have voting privileges to ensure that the gold industry standards for service dog training and care are upheld always by its member programs.

In the last newsletter I stated that I would be focusing more this year on enhancing curriculum and ensuring compliance with ADI and our current Wounded Warrior Service Dog Project. The WWSDP focuses on the development and implementation of gold star standards for the service dog industry and is specifically focused on standards for organizations serving the veteran population. The WWSDP standards are currently under evaluation and development. One of our Board Members, Joe Tedesco and myself will be attending a conference at Walter Reed Medical Center in Bethesda, MD. in July to participate in a focus group workshop that will further define the final recommendations for proposed standards to congress.

Below is a summary of the current industry standards from Assistance Dogs International.

1. Administration- to ensure that programs demonstrate operational stability; sound and ethical business practices; financial transparency; responsible use of resources; adequate safety and emergency procedures; adherence to applicable laws and regulations; have fair and equal policies and procedures for staff and volunteers; and that people taking part in program training do not get the impression that completing such opportunities makes them qualified dog trainers.
2. Staff Education, Professional Development & Trainer Standards- to ensure that all program staff and volunteers involved in the training process of assistance dogs have a sound knowledge and practical experience in dog health, welfare, humane training methods, appropriate socialization, an understanding of temperaments required for assistance dogs, safe interactions, and client disabilities. (These standards are separate from the ADI Trainer Certification program and do not require ADI Trainer Certification.)
3. Client Services- to ensure that programs have a clear and comprehensive application, screening, and matching process for clients; that clients are treated equally and with respect and dignity; that clients receive a thorough individualized educational process regarding all aspects of assistance dog partnership; and that programs provide lifetime follow-up support and team support.
4. Breeding & Dog Supply- to ensure that programs have a responsible source and the means to obtain dogs that meet the highest standards for health and temperament required of assistance dogs.
5. Dog Training & Behavior- to ensure that all policies and procedures regarding selection, training, and care of dogs are in accordance with ADI Standards for dogs; that there is a comprehensive education and training program individualized to the needs of the dog and the client; and that there are detailed training records for each dog maintained.
6. Dog Health & Welfare- to ensure that programs provide humane care and treatment for all dogs that are the responsibility of the program; that qualified staff or volunteers work with veterinarians for health screenings and to create a comprehensive, balanced health care management plan with detailed records for each dog; and that programs uphold their commitment to the dog's welfare for the lifetime of the dog.

7. Facilities & Kennels- to ensure that all facilities and kennels used by the program provide the care needed to meet the individual needs of each dog; that kennels provide a safe and enriched environment; that there are proper maintenance and cleaning procedures throughout the entire facility; and that facilities are accessible to the population served.
8. Correctional Facility/Prison Programs- to ensure the program has comprehensive policies and procedures for operating a puppy raising/ training program in partnership with a correctional facility. (This standard is not currently applicable to SMSD.)
9. Psychiatric Service Dogs- to ensure that programs have a clear and comprehensive understanding of psychiatric diagnosis; utilize appropriate application, screening, and matching processes for clients; provide thorough and individualized client training regarding all aspects of the assistance dog partnership; and provide a lifetime follow-up and team support.
10. Facility Dogs- to ensure that all policies and procedures regarding selection, training, and care of dogs are in accordance with the ADI standards for dogs, that there is a comprehensive education and training program individualized to the needs of the dog and facility; and that there are detailed training records.

These standards are reviewed and updated annually by ADI work groups composed of individuals from accredited member organizations. Changes to standards are provided to all member organizations for input prior to implementation. ADI Standards that are implemented or modified are in turn incorporated into the SMSD organization's standard operating procedures. Auditing of SMSD program documents and site visits by ADI assessors are required when we apply for reaccreditation. Accreditation renewals are good for 5 years.

In summary, I hope that this information provides our readers with a better idea about all of the facets involved in producing great assistance dog teams. As a co-founding member of Smoky Mountain Service Dogs it pleases me greatly to see how well the organization has evolved and is always striving to exceed the standards of excellence. I hope that each of you reading this understands the significant impact that your contributions make. Without your contributions, none of this would be possible.

*Heather Wilkerson*

### Who Doesn't Love a Puppy Welcome, new Trainees!



# NEWS FROM YOUR VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR TEAM

*Message from Carla Navas, SMSD Volunteer Director*

*Happy Spring Everyone!*



I'm pleased to say that we currently have 207 volunteers on our rolls. That is a great number for an organization our size. It's a testament to how much we rely on our volunteers to keep our program running. We clearly could not do it without you all and we are truly grateful for every one of you. And coming soon, we will be adding a separate newsletter that will be solely focused on and distributed to our volunteer base. We are excited to have the additional pages to share information with you all. If you have anything that you would like to know about, please feel free to email me at [carla.n@smokymountainservicedogs.org](mailto:carla.n@smokymountainservicedogs.org). We will do our best to provide the information and content you wish to see in the coming months. Thank you!!

## Welcome 1Q 2024 New SMSD Volunteers!



Jim Caughorn, Board of Directors  
James & Terri Austin, Canine Transport  
Larry Benson, Canine Transport  
Dolly Figiel, Canine Transport  
Phil Marechal, Canine Transport  
Barbie Stevenson, Canine Transport  
Linda Wicklund, Canine Transport  
Coordinator  
Tim & Judy Kowal, Puppy Raisers  
Priscilla & Jared Maness, Puppy Raisers  
Joshua Drake, UT Socializer  
Sarah Grace Kosek, UT Socializer  
Laura Leaman, UT Socializer  
Autumn Mclean, UT Socializer & Puppy  
Raiser  
Sophie Riggs, UT Socializer  
Samantha Ruder, UT Socializer  
Anthony Staropoli, UT Socializer



Grace Nystrom, Professor Amy Engstrom - Clugg,  
Lauren Haggerson, Amy Li

## UT Volunteer Puppy Partners

In 2019 our very own trainer, Laura Porter, then a student at UT, started a student organization dedicated to public education and fundraising in partnership with SMSD. Originally called Smokeys Service Dogs, the program commenced right before the COVID pandemic, which ended up putting the club on pause. Four years later, it was rebranded as Volunteer Puppy Partners and has expanded to include socializing and puppy raising opportunities for students, as well as continuing with public education. Working closely with Deb Sciarretta as well as campus administration, we now have 12 student socializers, and 3 puppy raisers! The VPP Club would not be possible without our dedicated Canine Transport Team, which is headed by Kathy Monaghan. SMSD transporters assist in getting dogs to campus from their respective puppy raisers and back home again. There could be no VPP without the transport team! The UT students are amazing and continue to offer the dogs a wide variety of exposure opportunities on campus to aid in their development into our superb mobility assistance dogs.

We are thrilled with the campus support that has been given to these students and we are indebted to our faculty advisor, Professor Amy Engstrom - Clugg, for being a champion of the program and UT student, Grace Nystrom, who serves as the student president.

Grace has been a part of the program since 2020 and has worked hard to solidify the VPP presence on campus. Starting as a socializer, then transitioned to puppy raising. Enough cannot be said about the dedication that Grace provides to the mission of SMSD, through everything that she does on campus for the puppy partners group as well as a volunteer canine handler. We are elated with the development of the VPP program and look forward to many future years of student involvement and success through socializing and puppy raising.

(Application Team - cont.)



After interviewing hundreds of veterans over the years, it has opened my eyes to what serving our country really means. While it is extremely humbling to hear their individual stories, it's heartbreaking to hear about their difficulties and struggles. For me, it's a blessing to be able to talk with, get to know, and honor each veteran - whether they get a service dog from SMSD or not."

This is definitely a team effort. Many team members mentioned how the sharing of information and responsibilities keeps things moving along during the process and how collaboration has allowed the process to evolve with time and experience.

Glennie Browne, RN, and Lynne Shea conduct initial interviews with service dog applicants. They do an excellent job at interviewing while gaining information about the applicant, including making the hard decision to send "decline responses" when the fit for the veteran and SMSD isn't right.

Glennie joined the as a volunteer in October 2019 and has held several roles, including transporting, socializing, volunteer coordinator and the application team. She reported her "biggest payoff to date" when, after following an applicant from the initial interview through his graduation with his service dog, she was able to witness his dedication, motivation and devotion to the dog and the process to enable him to successfully complete all the steps necessary to obtain his mobility assistance service dog. Seeing success stories like this one really help to overcome the darker aspects of what the team sees.

Lynne started volunteering as a transporter and then was recruited to join the application team. Her many years as a paralegal interviewing clients helped prepare her to conduct client interviews. She has enjoyed working with the team and is grateful for the opportunity to be involved in helping veterans.

## (Application Team - cont.)

Robin Richards is primarily responsible for managing, tracking and reporting on the client intake process. She assists in revising forms and maintaining electronic and hard copy files to ensure we are meeting compliance requirements. She attends home visits and also performs an assortment of administrative tasks, research, and special assignments when required. While she has volunteered in many different capacities over the last eight years, she says, "This role is significant in that I really feel a connection to the organization's mission."

The passing of the leash has always been moving, but now it's even more meaningful to me. I've seen firsthand the progress of the client from their preliminary application through graduation. To know where they were initially, to witness what they've accomplished, and to understand how their quality of life will be improved is incredibly inspirational."

Jody Butler, LCSW, reviews applications to be sure the applicant is capable of handling and caring for a service dog and, if necessary, she interfaces with their mental health provider to gather more information. The information she collects helps the trainers design the hands-on training camp in the most efficient way possible. Jody has been on the team since June 2021 and brings her experience working with veterans in her private practice as well as her love of dogs to SMSD. She describes the organization as "top notch" and says she is grateful to be a part of it.

Carla Werner has been with the team the longest and has seen how the process has evolved and how everyone works together to share the responsibilities. Carla has also helped in special events and networking with the Chamber of Commerce and she continues to assist with the annual progress reports.

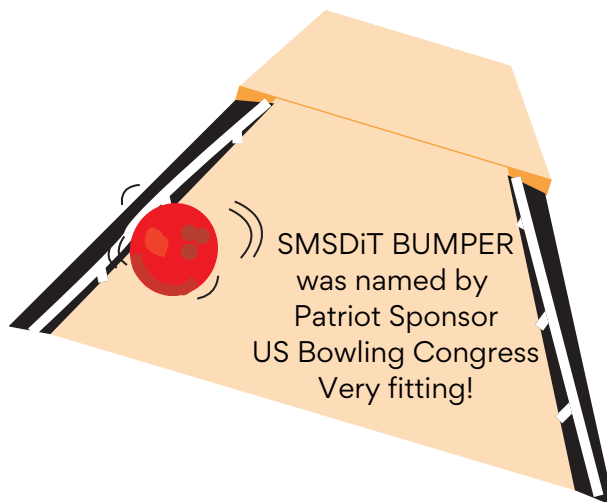
Gale Frana conducts Public Access Tests on our new teams and also the recertifications that must be done to ensure the canine/handler team performing tasks safely and meet required standards. She also leads the team which conducts the annual or semi-annual interviews conducted with our recipients.

Marga Hinsley, RN: "I've been with SMSD since 2014. My roles have been socializer (partnering w my children when they were too young to be solo), weekend respite, puppy raiser, advanced foster and Application Team member. As an app team member I have conducted initial interviews with potential clients to determine eligibility or if we aren't the right fit for various reasons. I've also been involved in the follow-up annual interviews with program graduates. Watching teams do well and hearing how our services have improved their quality of life, as well as helping navigate any issues they maybe having, supporting them, has been rewarding. I've watched dogs grow and learn from 8 weeks to graduation. I've seen a veteran submit a preliminary application, proceed to a full application and finally matched with a perfect canine partner. All the steps, all the pieces, all the people working together to make it happen - it's really amazing!"

Marga has recently stepped back from her role to concentrate on her nursing career.

All Application Team members, past and present, work hard to keep the process moving along as efficiently as possible with the goal of matching applicants to a quality mobility service dog.





#### SMSD JET -

Our precious Jet was a detection dog who was recruited from the Auburn University program by Heather Wilkerson who recognized the qualities that would make her an excellent mobility service dog: highly affectionate, work ethic and motivated to work. The name "Jet" can mean "black stone, home ruler; beloved." She was all those things and is greatly missed.

*We ♥ our  
Volunteers*

Our Specialty License Plate is a stylish and simple way to support SMSD. They are available in every Tennessee county for any car registered in the state.



Congratulations to Volunteer Puppy Partners for being awarded the "Outstanding New Student Organization" Award!



**venmo**



[HTTP://SMOKYMOUNTAIN SERVICEDOGS.ORG/](http://smokymountain servicedogs.org/)

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