

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE DOG WEEK

August 6-12, 2017

Founded in 1988, Helping Paws breeds, trains, and matches service dogs with people who have a physical disability and veterans with PTSD. Dogs live in a home environment for more than two years with volunteers who work daily to build the dogs' skills. Weekly training classes focus on more than 70 cues the dogs learn to assist their lifelong service partners. On this week and every day, we honor the dogs and their lifetime partners who allow us to help change lives. Eight graduate teams are featured below: They represent a spectrum of the services and impact Helping Paws service dogs provide.

Please also visit our Facebook page each day this week to see more graduate teams!



Angie and Baylor: Connection

Anyone who has ever had a companion animal understands the connections that develop between animals and their people: Animals are not simply pets, they are family. For Angela Folie, who lives with spinal muscular atrophy, the connection runs very deep. Angie has used a wheelchair since she was 12 years old. Baylor is her second dog from Helping Paws, succeeding Milo in 2014. Born in December 2011, Baylor completed 2 ½ years of training with a volunteer trainer before being matched with Angie.

As a clinical psychologist with Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute, Angie is acutely aware of the many roles a service dog can play in someone's life. Baylor accompanies her throughout the day, breaking barriers so that patient conversations are easier. He retrieves things she needs, helps her dress in the morning, make dinner at night, and completes tasks that would be impossible for Angie alone.

With a single story, Angie captures the changes a dog can bring to a human partner. "Like many others, sometimes I drop my keys when I am inside my van, ready to drive away. It has, in the past, taken me up to 45 minutes to find someone to come out to the van and pick up the keys. Baylor retrieves them for me in 30 seconds and we are on our way."



Maxine and Chai: Partner

Who knew an onion could lead to a lifelong partnership?

Maxine copes daily with the challenges of severe neuropathy. Although she had heard about Helping Paws from a friend, she never got around to pursuing a service dog until the day an onion got away from her. Maxine frequently uses a “reacher,” a tool with claws designed to help pick up dropped items. Preparing dinner one evening, she dropped a red onion on the floor. Attempting to pick it up, she instead launched it across the room. Her three pet Schnauzers took the invitation to play, resulting in an onion that was bruised and battered when it was finally retrieved by a human.

Now that she has been paired with her Helping Paws retriever, Chai (sister to Baylor), Maxine no longer faces the delays and frustrations that the red onion typifies. Conversely, when Chai isn’t with her, Maxine’s vulnerability skyrockets. The limitations neuropathy provides can make what seems to be a simple task an insurmountable obstacle.

How quickly can Helping Paws dogs meet the need to help a partner? During one of their first moments together—having just begun three weeks of training as a team—Maxine dropped the key to her electric scooter underneath the vehicle. Chai promptly scrambled under the scooter, clasped the key in her mouth and dropped it into Maxine’s outstretched hand. For Maxine, this sealed the deal: A lifelong partnership that began with an offer of true service.



Joe and Bogey: We Got This

Joe Kolfage is an Army veteran who served in Iraq from 2004–2005. Diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Joe lived for more than a decade with symptoms that can be very crippling. Joe’s wife Kat found Helping Paws while researching PTSD and ways to alleviate stress, anxiety, and isolation. Ultimately Joe was matched with Bogey, a big fun-loving Golden Retriever, in the summer of 2015.

Bogey helped Joe restore his independence and ability to travel outside of his home. Joe refers to Bogey as his “battle buddy,”

a trait the dog showed even at the Helping Paws graduation ceremony. Up on stage before an auditorium of people, Bogey positioned himself in front of Joe and proceeded to scan the audience, side-to-side, for the entire length of the ceremony. In public, Bogey automatically creates a similar blocking position for Joe. When Joe's anxiety level rises, Bogey will nudge his hand or leg to reassure him and remind him of the present. At home, he demonstrates the same caring behavior and is clearly attuned to Joe's emotional state: When he senses the need, Bogey rests his head on Joe's leg, staring up at him and wagging his tail to invite him to pet or play.

Joe sums up his relationship with the big dog by saying "Bogey embodies everything I was hoping for in a service dog and more that I would never even thought of. I don't think of him as a pet or just my service dog, but as a close friend and comrade."



Paul and Franny: Steady

A Marine veteran who served in Vietnam, Paul suffered the debilitating effects from PTSD for more than 40 years. His match with Golden Retriever Franny in 2015 brought a quickly apparent change to his life: On their first morning together, Paul woke up because Franny was gently licking his hand. He realized after the fact that he had been having a nightmare. True to her training, Franny recognized his stress and worked to alleviate it.

That was the beginning.

Franny accompanies Paul to many places, including such busy venues as the State Fair (where she was unexpectedly introduced by a radio host), but day after day, night after night, it is her companionship that changes life the most. Every night, Franny places herself between Paul and the door. Her presence allows him to rest, knowing his friend is watching out for him.



Jaime and Clio: The Halves

Jaime suffered a massive stroke in 2012 that severely limited her use of the left side of her body. After months of physical therapy, she was able to walk again. Without any functional use of her left arm or hand, though, Jaime operates in a world of halves: Half the number of hands to cook with, half the ability to carry large loads, and a world not designed to meet her even halfway in the middle of the needs presented by her disability.

Jaime finally allowed herself to think about the possibility that perhaps another “half” could help her navigate the world. She connected with Helping Paws and was matched with Clio, a Golden Retriever with a calm, patient disposition. That quiet

disposition is an attribute for a service dog, yet over time Clio has also revealed herself as the tail-wagging complement to Jaime’s own personality. Clio adapted to Jaime’s habit of taking daily walks, and Jaime has learned that Clio and she both benefit with a plan that includes new places and things to do together.

Jaime’s family goes up to the lakes of northern Minnesota each year. Her first trip to the lake with Clio also brought a signature moment for Jaime: With Clio at her side, Jaime was able to walk on the lakeshore and feel the sand beneath her feet without her previous unsteadiness. For most Helping Paws partners, and certainly Jaime and Clio, these “everyday moments” are perhaps the greatest life-changing minutes the highly trained dogs can provide.



Deb and Honor: Constant Presence

Deb lives with a neurological condition. Honor is her fourth service dog in the last 15 years. He succeeded Tanna as Deb’s service partner. The decision to seek another dog was as emotionally difficult as it was necessary. Losing any animal is hard on the emotions, but as Deb says, “It’s even harder when it’s your four-legged helper who is always there to assist, every hour of every day, no questions asked.”

Nevertheless, at the urging of her son, Deb sought another Helping Paws dog and was matched with Honor in 2015. “He is my first Labrador, and I’m learning important Lab things such as

don't take that tail into the antique store where glassware is at just the right level. He has a goofy attitude and the funniest thing is how excited he gets when he sees me. He will jump so high that all four paws come off the floor."

Honor also shows a serious side, readily retrieving dropped items and opening doors with calm efficiency. Just as important to Deb is the companionship he offers. "He takes care of me emotionally. When my son was preparing to be a police officer, Honor knew when news stories affected me. When I am scared, he will stay right next to me with some part of his body touching mine, for however long I need that reassurance."



Sheila and Hugo: Continuing Service

Hugo may simply be the gift that keeps on giving. At the age of four, he has transformed life for two partners, offering devotion to each of them.

Luke and Hugo became a team in early 2015. Luke's life had been irrevocably altered by a car accident two years earlier. He sustained a spinal cord injury that left him a quadriplegic and in need of extensive recovery time. Facing the reality of what was ahead, Luke's family found new homes for his two companion Labrador Retrievers by working with a rescue service. Luke persevered with therapy and recovery services, meeting others with Helping Paws

service dogs in the process. When it was possible, he applied for a service dog and was matched with Hugo, a handsome black Labrador who helped him dress, turned on lights, opened doors and stayed focused on Luke through thick and thin. Sadly, Luke died at the end of 2016, a passing that saddened so many who had been touched by his humor and courage.

Hugo returned temporarily to his Foster Home Trainers. A few months later, he was matched with Sheila. Like Luke, Sheila loves Labs, and her new partner Hugo is offering up his huge heart and skill set to increase Sheila's independence and quality of life.



Tess and Macy: Gratitude

At age 26, Tess loved her job as a hospice social worker. In 2014 she underwent surgery to treat an aggressive tumor on her spine. The surgery left her paralyzed from the waist down. She was subsequently matched with service dog Macy, and the two have an uncanny ability to sense each other's moods. Says Tess, "Macy and I seem to have an understanding of each other that's hard to explain. When either of us are in a funk, the other one knows how to lovingly get her out of it."

Macy is also helpful on many other fronts, helping Tess get dressed and undressed, opening doors, picking up dropped items, and more. Tess enthusiastically gives as much as she gets.

"I'm excited to have and be Macy's companion, her go-to

person for all that she needs. If she could speak, she might say in turn that she loves my playful and nurturing personality."

In the ensuing years and with Macy by her side, Tess has overcome additional health challenges and treatments. She has returned to her field in social services, helping others restore a quality to life and day-to-day experiences. In turn, Macy supports Tess and enjoys life (and play) with a loving family who sees her effect each and every day.