



Operation Freedom Paws

Four Paws, Two feet, One team

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Operation Freedom Paws

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"Everything, every day, is a training opportunity"
-Mary Cortani

Founder's Message

Memorial Day has been long known as a day of remembrance for the men and women who have died in service to our country. We would like to encourage a new tradition of having this day be one to also remember veterans who were

injured, as well as those still actively protecting our freedoms.

This time of year, veterans may display effects from their military experiences that can last for weeks, and some may begin to slide into depression. This is often a time when psychological wounds of losing "battle buddies" are reopened, or when memories of military sexual trauma



resurface---triggered by martial music and uniforms. Memorial Day is also a time when military family members grieve for those wounded and lost.

Be mindful not to say "Happy Memorial Day", as for many it is not a day for picnics and celebration. Instead, thank veterans for your freedoms, and remember all they have sacrificed while serving our country. Memorial Day is a time for reverent remembrance, and we encourage all to do just that.

Meet Karah and River

How did you hear about OFP?

A woman who participates in the program with her son and his service dog Marley saw me at work and asked if I had ever considered using a service dog. I told her that I looked into CCI in the past but I wasn't interested in the program because it required more then I was able to do on my own. I didn't want to ask for more help from my family. Not because my family wasn't willing, but because I struggle to be independent, so asking for more help just wasn't attractive to me.

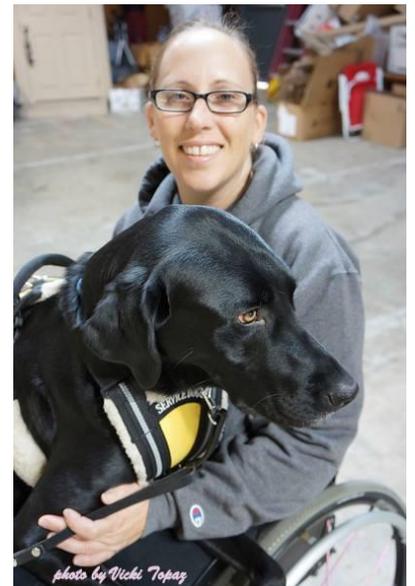


photo by Vicki Topaz

Upcoming Events:

Gilroy Chevy's
Fundraiser Fiesta
Night

May 29, 2014

OFP 5K Fun Run
Vasona Park

June 1, 2014

Poker Run
Morgan Hill/San
Martin

August 23, 2014

Wine Gala
The Mountain
Winery, Saratoga
September 13, 2014

Details can be found
and tickets can be
purchased online at
[operationfreedompa
ws.org](http://operationfreedompa
ws.org).



What about this program/process attracted you?

I liked that I would learn how to train my service dog. It made me feel capable and in control. I liked that I would see progress. I saw it in the other OFP teams and I saw it in myself.

When Mary matched you with River, was there any hesitation to your relationship?

I remember the day so clearly. It was March 11, 2013. She told me to come to class early, that she may have a dog for me. I was so nervous. I was too nervous to be excited. I was so afraid that River was not going to respond to me, so I didn't let myself have any expectations. I fell in love with River the minute he looked right at me. We went through class together that night and we have been together ever since.

Now that you are certified, what are some of the challenges you face out in public?

Because I am in a wheelchair, people already tend to stare. Now they stare at River mostly, instead of me. This makes River bark once in a while at the person staring, because that kind of eye contact in the dog world is considered rude behavior. It's a delicate line. I feel more confident when I am out by myself because I know that no one will ever be able to sneak up on me or get to me when I have river. But when he barks in public, when I don't perceive a threat, it makes me incredibly anxious!

What tools from the program did you find most useful (if there is any one in particular)?

Many people with disabilities, all types of disabilities have built walls up. Every tool we learn in the program has a side effect of chipping away at those walls.

I love that the program is not just about training dogs to do tasks. Of course that is a big part of the program but the biggest part is the forming of relationships; relationships between dog and client, between client and mentor, and between clients. We have become a family.

How is your life different now with River?

I was a very different person before the chair. I had no fear or vulnerability. If I wanted to do something, I had no question as to whether or not I could do it. I would just figure out how. I have a beautiful daughter who is my pride and joy. She was my main focus for her first 18 years. Even when I got sick, everything I did was based on her---on keeping her strong, or protecting her. Sure I made mistakes, everyone does, but I did my best. Two years ago she went away to college and I felt like I mourned my old life all at once. She was still my focus but she wasn't here every day so I felt like the house was too quiet and I had too much time to look back---and even scarier, to look ahead. I suddenly felt





Awards

2012 CNN Top Ten Hero

2011 Napa County Red Cross Hero

Commendation / Proclamations

2013 Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors

2013 Gilroy Chamber of Commerce Good Egg Award

2012 City of Gilroy

vulnerable when I went out and was always looking over my shoulder, making sure I could reach the exit if I needed to. I would try to devise a plan in my head for what I would do in case my house caught on fire or there was a natural disaster. I dreaded leaving the house, didn't see my friends much and even started isolating myself from my family. I know my daughter was nervous about leaving me home alone too. She worried about me and I wanted to take that away for her.

With River, I feel safer. I still always check the exits and I still get claustrophobic in small spaces, but now when I go to the store with River, I don't feel like I am constantly on edge. And I see it in my family also. My daughter feels more confident leaving since I have River to help me. When I am out with my family and I have River, they aren't always trying to help me or push me. They can just enjoy spending time with me because they know that if I am tired, River will pull me. Or if I am hurting, River will let them know. He always tells on me. And when I miss my daughter while she's away at school, River always does something silly to make me smile.

What advice would you give someone thinking a service dog is right for them?

Really put some thought into it before deciding on a service dog. A service dog is a great tool, the best friend and a part of you. But it is a lot of work. The work is what makes the relationship so strong. So if you are looking for an easy fix, you will be disappointed. But if you are willing to do the work, the reward is a great one.

Help Prevent Fake Service Animals

The Americans with Disabilities Act states that "service animals are defined as dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities." The law is written loosely to allow people in a variety of economic, physical, and living situations to have access to a service dog. It is clear, however, that the attempt to allow disabled people of all circumstances access to service dogs has led to abuse of the system. Able-bodied people take their dogs everywhere with them, claim they are service dogs, and are confident that business owners will be unwilling to challenge them because of federal laws. Passing off a pet as a service dog is a misdemeanor, but the risk of legal action and negative publicity can be daunting to a business owner who questions anyone who claims to have a service dog.

SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE.

We have proposed a simple solution to this growing problem: legal identification that all disabled people can easily obtain. By modifying the existing process to obtain handicap access, namely handicap placards, disabled

people with real service dogs can complete a form and have it signed by a physician, submit it to the DMV, and receive a small paw print sticker or something





similar on a driver's license or ID card to signify a genuine and legal need for a service dog.

Our petition is the first step to changing this legislation. Please help protect our disabled Americans who rely on their service dogs to live independent, fulfilling lives.

YOU CAN HELP! Sign our *petition*.

Training Tip: Crate Training 101

OFP is a supporter of crate training for various reasons; the most important being that we try to give everyone in our program a sense of security, including the dogs, and crates do just that.



Most canines in our program (85%) are rescues, and much like their handlers, are experiencing a transitional period. Both handler and dog are trying to forge new paths; and with this comes insecurity. The crate can help mitigate much of the anxiety for the dog by offering a warm, safe place to unwind.

Here are the steps to help make this a positive experience for all:

For ALL Dogs:

1. Have an appropriately sized crate.
2. Try to avoid grated crates as those with walls offer more security.
3. If you own a grated crate, make sure it is in a corner so most sides are enclosed.
4. Place crate in the most populated room of the house to avoid feelings of isolation/neglect.
5. Make the crate inviting by placing your dog's favorite blanket, stuffy or toy in the crate.
6. Be sure to give high-valued treats (not the standard every day treat) to the dog while in the crate to help reinforce it is a good space.

*Helpful Tip: place a high valued treat within a small opening of a toy or freeze it into a large opening of a toy and let them solve the puzzle to get the treat

For Puppies

1. Be sure to build up to long stays in the crate. Have your dog go in for short periods of time (15 minutes or so) while you are home, and then build up to extended periods of time.



2. For housebreaking make sure crate is large enough that they can turn around, but small enough that they cannot separate sleep area from potty space. Every time they have to “go” (or begin to) pick them up and carry them outside, not letting their paws touch the ground until you are in the place for them to “go”.
3. All of the above steps “For All Dogs” should be applied.

If handlers are approaching the crate like a “time-out” space with nothing for the dog to do, it will seem like a prison to everyone in the family. If the crate becomes instead, that special “quiet” place where they can go to work on puzzles, like getting the frozen goodies out of the Kong, it becomes a safe, welcoming spot that they look forward to spending time in.

2014 Annual Golf Tournament

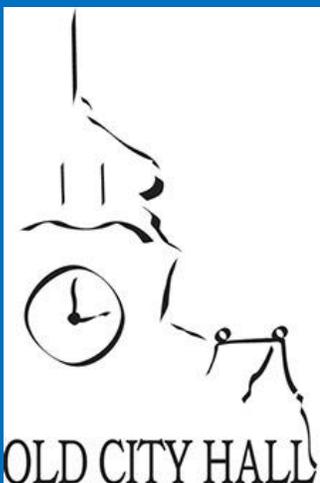
It was a sunny and breezy day on the 3rd of May, 2014, when 48 golfers teed off to support OFP at our Annual Spring Golf Tournament Fundraiser at Gilroy Golf Course.



Our picnic lunch, lovingly prepared by OFP volunteers and sponsored by Ford Store Morgan Hill, kicked off the festivities. The golfing began with a shotgun start and scramble for ball position. This casual competition was comprised of contests for straightest drive, best putt, closest to the pin and Hire a Pro. To bolster our guests’ energy, more dedicated OFP volunteers were on hand to deliver course-side concierge service in the form of beverages and snacks. When golfers needed a breather, the eighth hole provided just that, with sweeping views of the southern tip of the Santa Clara Valley and the Gabilan Mountain range.

After a wonderful day of fun on the golf course, the evening was underway. Our dinner and reception venue was sponsored by Old City Hall. Built in 1905, this unique building has been through two major earthquakes and numerous floods, but it continues to stand as the one landmark that says “you’re in Gilroy!” Bobby and Fran Beaudet’s family- and dog-friendly atmosphere allowed our guests to comfortably converse as they dined. The games continued into the evening with a silent auction and drawing, bringing in even more revenue for Operation Freedom Paws. To top off the evening, Dessert Queen Nancy Silva had carefully created and donated at least a dozen different varieties of fabulous desserts.

Of course the biggest winner of the day was Operation Freedom Paws. Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors and guests, we raised \$15,706.27 in total profit, all of which will go directly to benefit our clients. In addition, Macquarie Group Foundation will again match dollar-for-dollar what we raised at this event. This means that our grand total will be \$31,412.54!





We would like to sincerely thank Macquarie Group Foundation, Gilroy Golf Course, Morgan Hill Ford Store, Old City Hall, and Nancy Silva for their generous support of this year's Spring Golf Tournament. Thank you to our board members, with a special thank you to Carroll Connell who has been chairing this event since the beginning. Our heartfelt thanks to all of our supporters, volunteers and benefactors; we could not have done this without you!

How you can help

- Look us up! We offer civilian training too! Proceeds from our public training activities help support our work with veterans and other individuals with disabilities. K9 Coach Plus has now been folded into Operation Freedom Paws; therefore, all proceeds will benefit OFF.
- Have time to volunteer? There are youth and adult volunteer opportunities. Contact Volunteer Coordinator Colleen at colleenofp@yahoo.com
- Make a secure credit card donation by using the "Donate" button at <http://operationfreedompaws.org> or send a check to Operation Freedom Paws at our mailing address listed above.
- Shop on Amazon? Use Amazon Smile and a percentage of your total is given to your favorite charity; which we hope is OFF.
- Click the "wish list" button to purchase an item from the Operation Freedom Paws Wish List. This purchase will go directly to a dog and human team!
- Proclaim your love for OFF by purchasing your very own "swag" from our new online store (linked to our website).
- Come support us at our next event!
- Like us on Facebook!



An AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB Program

