



# Operation Freedom Paws

*Four Paws, Two Feet, One Team*

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## Operation Freedom Paws

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[operationfreedompaws.org](http://operationfreedompaws.org)



*\*K9 Coach Plus has now been folded into Operation Freedom Paws, therefore, all proceeds will benefit OFP.*

## Founder's Message



"We are consistently growing and I am greatly appreciative of all the support from our volunteers and clients who pitch in to make us a success. This is another example of how it really does take a village. This village truly has come together and made an impact. I couldn't do this alone and I am eternally grateful for all the support and help. I am busier than I have ever been and though it gets tough sometimes, my life is enriched every day by the clients we serve. We truly are a family that I am so proud of."

***"Four Paws, Two Feet, One Team."***

Mary Cortani

Founder and President

## Meet Denny and Abbey

Denny was 22 years old when he was drafted in April, 1968. After basic training, he spent 12 months in Vietnam doing reconnaissance. His regiment, I Company 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger, crept through the jungles of Vietnam in teams of 5 or 6 searching for the enemy. More than once, Denny would be one of two men who survived a mission.

During the 12 months Denny served in Vietnam, he lost 23 friends. In October of 1969, Denny came home. He was exposed to Agent Orange, was plagued with Malaria, and had lost too many friends. Nonetheless, he was proud to have served his country.



Unfortunately, he came home to a country full of anger and hate. Instead of a welcoming homecoming, protestors spat at Denny and his fellow soldiers as they arrived at the San Francisco Airport. Before Denny was drafted, he had a good job, was married, and was well established in his community. After Vietnam, his wife divorced him, he wasn't welcome at his previous job, people refused to offer him other work, and his community hated him.

For the next 30 years, Denny did his best to cope. He married Sandy, a wonderful and supportive woman, and they started their own



Photo by Vicki Topaz

## Upcoming Events:

### 🔄 Costume Pets & Headshots Day

Halloween Pet Photo Shoot by Peggy Dean Creative Photography

October 26, 2013

9:00am to 5:00pm

Family Pet Care Center

38 East St.  
Hollister, CA

Call to reserve your spot 831-637-7387

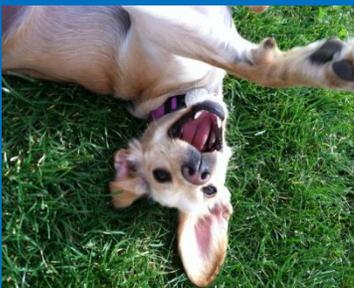
Pricing starting at \$35

Sitting fee waived!

Fun costumes provided for your pet!

### 🔄 Casino Night Coming after the holidays!

Date and time TBA



manufacturing business. He worked hard at the business and with Sandy, and raised two kind, loving sons. Denny did his best to keep his Vietnam experiences buried deep---not talking about them, not dealing with them. In 1993, three of Denny's Ranger buddies found him on the internet. They asked Sandy, "Do you know that you are married to a hero?" She had no idea what he had survived or even that he had been awarded three Bronze stars.



In the summer of 2008, Denny and Sandy took a pivotal trip to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington D.C. Denny had 28 names to find on that wall; 5 more friends had passed since his return home. As he found the names, he and Sandy sat in front of the Wall. For the first time, Denny talked. After telling Sandy about each name on that wall, Denny went and sat on a bench for a long while. Denny remembers the moment, "That's when I realized that I'd lost control of my emotions. It's too big a problem and I can't get my arms around this." Sandy described Denny at that moment as being in an almost catatonic state. She didn't know how to help him.

Denny was never the same after this trip. Everything he had kept bottled up was fighting to come out. He internalized it so much that he was continually vomiting. He was angry, depressed, physically ill and just wanted to stay in bed. He wasn't able to function day to day and was forced to sell their manufacturing business. Denny didn't leave the house often, but when he did, he would not leave without Sandy. She had become his full-time care giver. His family begged him to get help.

In July of 2012, Denny and Abbey, his statuesque Great Dane, joined the OFP family. Sandy drove a reluctant Denny to class the first time. He was nervous that first night, saying, "I don't think so" but he, Abbey and Sandy went through their first class. Mary told him, "This is a safe place Denny. I have your six." A couple of days later, it was time for the second class and Denny told Sandy, "I can go myself." He was able to go by himself because he realized he wasn't alone. He had Abbey by his side. Today, the very religious Denny says he actually feels safer in class than he does in church.



Photo by Vicki Topaz

Denny no longer wants to stay in bed. He no longer vomits because of pent-up emotions and memories. Every day is a challenge, but Denny is no longer just coping, he's living. "[Life is] an experience instead of a trial." Sandy adds. Now Abbey has his six. And if Denny's mind begins to wander, Abbey will gently nibble his hand and bring him back to present.

When asked how Abbey has influenced her life, Sandy says, "She saved all of our lives. I am no longer a caregiver. She brought my guy back to me."



## Fundraiser Roundup

This has truly been a quarter of collaboration! On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, we partnered with Dreampower Horsemanship for the “Wine, Woofs, and Hoofs” fundraiser which raised \$5,238 for each organization. Our own “Paws for Honor” fundraiser on September 6<sup>th</sup> raised \$13,336 thanks to the collaboration of generous donors, dedicated



patrons, and passionate volunteers. September 9<sup>th</sup> sent the team to Las Vegas to golf on the PGA championship course TPC Summerlin, our very first tournament outside of Gilroy. We are grateful for our hosts’ generosity, rooms for our veterans donated by Sun Coast Resort and Casino, and a donation from the Las Vegas Sands. Our trip to Las Vegas not only raised funds but also provided broader exposure for OFP. Finally, founder Mary Cortani was presented with a donation of \$3,000 from Some Gave All -The Joey Graves Foundation. The foundation works with Gold Star Families of fallen service men and women. The Foundation’s Facebook page states, “It was also our pleasure to be able to make a donation to Operation Freedom Paws for all the amazing work they do with veterans and Gold Star Families.” Through everyone’s generosity, we have raised over \$20,000 for OFP in the past three months. Thank you to all who have helped!

## Awards

2012 CNN Top Ten Hero

2011 Napa County Red Cross Hero

## Commendation / Proclamations

2012 City of Gilroy

2013 Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors

2013 Gilroy Chamber of Commerce Good Egg Award

## Tuolumne Trails

Mary is fond of reminding us that “every day is a training opportunity.” Nowhere is this more evident than when OFP comes together twice a year for Family Dog Camp. Located in the picturesque sierras near Yosemite National Park, Tuolumne Trails provides a perfect training setting. This September, however, camp almost didn’t happen. Just days before our clients and dogs were



scheduled to arrive, the Yosemite Rim fire came within 100 yards of Tuolumne Trails’ lower cabins. The camp and surrounding town had to be evacuated. A DC-10 flew over the main building just in time to drop retardant as the flames crested the

ridgeline. We are so grateful to those firefighters for preserving Tuolumne Trails and saving our favorite camp. This year’s outing was truly a blessing. We sat by the fire, ate s’mores, and shared stories. We went on a boat tour of Pine



Mountain Lake then took our parade of pups down to the shore where we played for hours. It wouldn't be dog camp without training, of course; we worked on stairs, elevators, recall, and practiced the basics like we always do!

10 year old Dylan's experience sums up the power of our OFP family. Terribly afraid of water, Dylan wasn't planning on going on the boat tour or playing in the lake. OFP mentor-trainer Jeff Wilson took Dylan aside for a private training and courage-building session. The next day, Dylan boarded the boat and splashed around in the water. After the boat ride, Dylan sincerely thanked the volunteer guide and exclaimed with Brennan, Dylan's OFP brother, that the ride was "so cool!" From finding the courage to try new activities, to just sitting and laughing together, the time we spent at camp brought us closer. We left feeling even more like family.



## 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 OFP.
- Have time to volunteer? There are youth and adult volunteer opportunities. Contact Volunteer Coordinator Colleen at [colleenofp@yahoo.com](mailto: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.
- 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!
- Come support us at our next event!
- Like us on Facebook!



An AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB Program



If you would like to be added to our electronic mailing list, please send an email to [info@operationfreedompaws.org](mailto:info@operationfreedompaws.org)