

OPERATION FREEDOM PAWS



OPERATION FREEDOM PAWS IN 2022



A LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER:

“The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention.” – Oscar Wilde

The world is a crazy place right now. I have been reflecting on where we are today, and how far we have come. I look at the struggles each and every one of us faces on a daily basis. I try to wrap my head around why it is that there is so much division between people. We have far more in common with each other than we do differences. I do not understand why we cannot find common ground, strive for solutions, and care about each other while understanding that we can chose to not agree. But where we can find common ground, know it is good for all of us.

I wish to see joy, happiness, and hope in your lives, as I do for our clients and their families. Here at OFP from the initial interview onward, we challenge clients to think about their “new normal” and dare them to dream about the possibilities of tomorrow. They begin to trust us in part because they see that we are ourselves, consistently working to create that new normal for OFP, and dream about the possibilities of tomorrow.

I want to challenge you to do the same. Be kind, be gentle, none of us are prefect or better than anyone else. And YES, we all bleed red. We all hurt; we all have struggles. But when we lift each other up, we are more human than animal. We are our best selves. Dogs teach us that lesson about humanity every day.

WE CANNOT KEEP DOING WHAT WE DO WITHOUT YOUR HELP.

My life is blessed every day working with a great staff, but most of all, working with our amazing clients, their families, and the dogs we pull from rescues to match with them.

Here is a simple story that brought me to tears. One of our clients, who has grown over the years from the OFP program and lives on a very small, fixed income, came up to me and asked if he could speak with me. I, of course, said yes. But only if I got my hug. We are space invaders around here, but that’s a story for another day. We go sit down and he pulls out an envelope and hands it to

Founder's Letter (cont'd)

me. I asked what it was, and he replies, "it's not much; I wish I could do more. I can never repay you for giving me my life back, my family back, and my amazing buddy." I opened the envelope to find a \$20 bill. He was crying and I asked what it was for and why. He said, "because people don't get it but you and OFP do. I want others to have what OFP has given me, a new life, hope for tomorrow. I hope it helps." At this point I am crying and remembering why OFP came to be. I said thank you, gave him another hug, and let him know that his \$20 would go with the \$30 in my pocket to buy one more gas card so that a client could get to class. He smiled and said, "thank you; I wish I could do more."

So, my challenge to you is what can we count on you to do? Help us save lives, PLEASE. You can set up a monthly donation via the OFP website "donate now" button. You can create fundraisers. You can put out a jar like one of our supporters did at their family BBQ and share the story of OFP and what it means to you. By the way, that supporter raised \$321.00 that day. You can set up a donation through your bank like paying a bill. You can see if your company matches donations, attend an event or become a sponsor. The list goes on and on of how you are empowered to make a difference. Thank you to all who have donated this year and supported the OFP mission in all the ways you have done so far. It is greatly appreciated. BUT PLEASE, continue to help our clients, their families, and their dogs. They need you, and those clients waiting to enter the program need you, now more than ever.

The services we provide our clients would not be possible without your donor support. As you read through this newsletter, please consider your year-end donations and possibly making a monthly recurring donation equivalent to the cost of one Starbucks's coffee per week. Every little bit helps. A monthly recurring donation makes a lasting, profound impact on the organization.

Your support allows OFP to reach out a helping hand to individuals in need, many of whom have lost faith in humanity and in the systems they fought to preserve. Clients understand that our program only exists because of you. Knowing that strangers actually care about what happens to them makes it possible for them to take on the challenge of creating their new normal. You give them hope; you allow them to dream of the possibility of a different tomorrow. Because of you, there is an "OFP Family", and you are part of it. For that, and so much more, we are eternally grateful.

My Sincerest Gratitude,
Mary Cortani, Founder and Executive Director of Operation Freedom Paws



Susan and Her Service Dog Ziggi

"How I Found My Voice"

Unlike many OFP teams, I am not a veteran. Following an assault and shortly thereafter running for my life at a mass shooting, I just couldn't shake the panic attacks and other symptoms of PTSD. Surviving a childhood of abuse from toddlerhood on, I was predisposed to react this way and had worked hard for many years seeking tranquility through a variety of therapies. I even made an award-winning documentary film called "Breaking Silence" to help others understand the lifelong effects of sexual trauma.

The shooting put me over the top and for months I went through life in a trance, feeling vulnerable and frightened by sudden noises. My adult daughters finally said to me, "Mom, you need a dog."



Susan and Her Service Dog Ziggi

"How I Found My Voice" (cont'd)

Thus began this most rewarding chapter. I rescued a standard poodle pup and named her Ziggi. We came to OFP as a very anxious pair. I was constantly breaking down and needing the support of the therapist on duty. Mary put her arms around me and reassured me often. With consistency and encouragement by the entire training staff, I got the structure and information I needed to train my dog and "find my voice". It was a big moment when Ziggi got her vest, but prouder yet when after months and months of training, we became a certified team.



Early on one of the trainers asked me about my relationship with my dog. Now I know what he meant and why that question was so important. I know Ziggi so well that I can tell what she wants and how she wants it, and she knows what I need and when I need it. We are besties! When I hear myself using my COMMAND voice, I smile inwardly because THAT has been my big challenge in life, to find my voice and use it with confidence to communicate what I want and need.

I now live calmly and in gratitude and I know full well that the Operation Freedom Paws training program gave this growth opportunity to me. That is why I am leaving a gift to OFP in my will. May OFP continue the work that helps people and their service dogs become teams living life to the fullest!

With love and gratitude,
Susan Hannah and Ziggi



Operation Freedom Paws (OFP) and Ravenox Teaming Up To Save Heroes At Both Ends Of The Leash

We're proud to announce a new collaboration spearheaded by OFP Ambassador and the CEO of Ravenox, Sean Brownlee, and our Founder and Executive Director, Mary Cortani. Sharing a commitment to their fellow veterans, Mary and Sean were the perfect collaborators to bring vision, development, and execution together to create a high-quality, handmade leather leash line for the marketplace.

Mary has trained over 7,000 dogs in her lifetime both in her military and nonprofit careers, while Sean has created a top retail and manufacturing company using his military experience and high-quality American-made products.

Currently a 6ft. braided leash, an 18ft. braided leash with a short traffic lead, and an 8-way leash are available for purchase on Ravenox website at www.ravenox.com. Look for Ravenox to release more exciting products in the coming weeks.

Part of the proceeds from every purchase will go toward OFP's mission and help to save heroes at both ends of the leash. Thank you, Sean and Mary!



Mary Cortani Named “Woman of the Year” for the 17th State Senate District

Congratulations to our Founder and Executive Director, Mary Cortani, who was named the “2022 Woman of the Year” by Senator John Laird for the 17th State Senate District. During a ceremony at Operation Freedom Paws on Friday, June 24th, Mary was presented with the award by Justin Tran, the District Representative for Monterey County on behalf of Senator Laird. The senator shared this statement with "Gilroy Life".

“Mary’s work has touched numerous lives not only in the 17th District, but across California,” Laird said. “Her unique program helps to prepare clients for more than a year at no cost to the individual. We know the average service dog can run anywhere from \$10,000 to \$40,000 out of pocket, which puts this vital tool out of reach for many working-class individuals who may need a service animal. What Mary and Operation Freedom Paws have accomplished is a true testament of her commitment and passion to see the community succeed.”

Since 1987, the California Legislature has been recognizing women who are making extraordinary differences in their communities. Mary was one of only 120 exceptional women honored in their districts across California.



“It’s an honor to receive this recognition from Senator Laird and his team that brings attention to the work we do at Operation Freedom Paws,” Mary shared with the "Morgan Hill Times". “I hope it drives more awareness to the critical issues our veterans, first responders and other individuals with disabilities face every day and serves as a catalyst for action. We need the support of our businesses and communities-at-large to continue our mission to provide our clients and their families with the resources they need to heal.”

We want to thank our clients who candidly discussed with the audience what it has meant to gain those resources to heal. Army veteran and OFP Mentor-Trainer Ramon said, “I honestly don’t think I would be here without Mary’s help and without Huey. That’s the way my life was going. If Mary could get Woman of the Year every year that would be great... She’s Woman of the Year forever in my life. I love you, Mary.”

We’re grateful to all our clients, their families, staff, friends, officials, media, and longtime supporters who were in attendance including City of Gilroy Mayor Marie Blankley, former Morgan Hill Councilmember Larry Carr, and Michael Moore from the "Gilroy Dispatch" and "Morgan Hill Times".

OFP Daycare and Boarding - Summertime!

An Update from Renee, Director of Operations

Summer is such a great time of year for outdoor activities with friends and family. Summer is also a unique time of year for your dog. There are many seasonal things to consider regarding their activities, health, comfort, and safety. Here are a few of our suggestions to help you and your dog enjoy every minute of it! But as always, please be sure to check with your veterinarian to create the best game plan for your dog's specific needs.

Activities to Beat the Heat:

Want to make a big splash with your dog? Get a kiddie pool or set up sprinklers in your backyard for some smart, summertime fun! Or why not take a long, leisurely walk in the early morning or in the late evening hours with your furry friend? And when it's just too hot to go outside, we suggest cuddling up and enjoying a movie and the AC together. Another great way to help your dog beat the heat is to give them a frozen Kong treat. Just fill a Kong with dry kibble and top it off with a tablespoon of 0% milkfat yogurt, then freeze it overnight. The next day you'll have a healthy, refreshing treat that's ready to go!

And just like us, pups enjoy being pampered. And nothing says pampered like an at home spa day-bathing and brushing them, cleaning their ears, trimming their nails, and giving them a doggie massage. Your dog will definitely appreciate all the TLC and quality time with you. Plus, they'll smell and look great! But spending quality time together can also mean finding the perfect shady spot where you can sit and read a book out loud to your dog and the entire family.



Summertime Precautions and Protections:

Heatstroke

It's important to know the signs and treatment for heatstroke, particularly for breeds that are most susceptible to it. The signs can include excessive panting, drooling, reddening of the gums (learn what your dog's gums look like under normal conditions), vomiting, and disorientation. If you suspect your dog is suffering from heatstroke, the safe, controlled reduction of their body temperature is essential. Make sure you immediately move them to a cool or shaded area. Cool water can be applied to their armpits and belly, but never cover a dog with a wet towel, it will actually keep in the heat! Hydration is also key; allow your dog to drink small amounts of cool water. Believe it or not, a dog's coat has several layers that can help them stay cool and protects them from sunburn. So opt not to shave them down.

Car Safety

NEVER EVER EVER leave your dog unattended in a car, especially during warm/hot weather. The temperature in a car, regardless if the windows are cracked, climbs rapidly. It is illegal in California to "leave a pet unattended in a motor vehicle under conditions that endanger the health or well-being of the animal", CA Penal Code Section 597.7 PC. And don't forget to bring water and a bowl for your pup when going out for a car ride to keep them hydrated.

OFP Daycare and Boarding - Summertime!

An Update from Renee, Director of Operations (cont'd)

Open windows are not a solution either and will not keep your car cool or your dog safe. When your car is in motion, open windows pose additional dangers. If your dog decides to hang their head or body out the window, they are at risk of injury (eyes, ears, and mouth) from airborne objects, or even worse, falling out if there is an abrupt turn. Dogs may also spot something and decide to jump out because a dog will ALWAYS be a dog.

Hot Pavement

Here is a good rule of thumb to follow. If the air temperature is above 85 degrees, the ground may be too hot to safely walk your dog. Not only do concrete pavements and asphalt heat up quickly, but artificial turf does too. To test the temperature of a surface, place the back of your hand on it. If you cannot hold your hand there for a full five seconds, then it is too hot for your dog's paws. To protect your dog on walks, go when it's cooler out, stay on the grass, use protective shoes, or water down areas around your home like patios, walkways, and driveways where you'd like to venture out.

Following these simple safety guidelines will help to make your summer a happy and memorable time with your dog. And don't forget to take lots of pics, laugh, stay cool, have fun, and most of all, love that incredible precious gift with four paws, or three paws if you have a tripod, by your side.



Event Fundraising Highlights

Thank You OFP Community

APRIL - OFP COMMUNITY EASTER EGG HUNT

While we started off the day with rain, it didn't seem to dampen anyone's spirits. We loved hosting all the amazing families who came out to join us and enjoy the day's festivities. Kids of all ages participated in Easter egg hunts, face painting, and chalk art. For those who "eye-spied" the golden eggs, they received additional goodies. Big thanks to our special guest, the Easter Bunny, our volunteers, OFP Therapy Dog Team, Sergeant Ed Soares and Duke, and most of all our community, for making this day spent together so special.



Event Fundraising Highlights

Thank You OFP Community (cont'd)

JUNE - THE OFP 11TH ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT

We have the best supporters! We want to thank our sponsors, in-kind donors, volunteers, staff, board members, ambassadors, BackSwing Golf Events, our host Coyote Creek Golf Club and the 100 golfers who took to the course in support of our mission on Friday, June 3rd.

Golfers started the day with a light breakfast and warm-up on the range, then hit the course for a foursome scramble tournament that included games, a chance to "Beat the Pro" Emily Larson, and a Farmers Insurance hole-in-one challenge worth \$7,500. While no one made the shot, it definitely added to the excitement of the day. The tournament was followed by a beautiful brunch overlooking the 18th hole and a silent auction where winning bidders took home prizes like a Titleist golf bag and a sailing excursion.

A BIG CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR TOURNAMENT WINNERS!

1st - Jacob Jackson, Darwin Fajardo, Hector Sanabria, Justin Vincent

2nd - Jared Gamble, Mark Gamble, Doug Lung, Frank Doyle (National Electrical Contractors Association)

3rd - Robert Crum, Brian Tucker, Ken Vereschagin, Cary Oneal

Longest Drive (Men) - Stan Gallo (Lokey Firearms)

Longest Drive (Women) - Brenda Martin

Closest to the Pin - Dan Sullivan (IBEW Local 332)



GOLF TOURNAMENT SPONSORS SHOUTOUT!

Please join us in thanking our Ace, Condor, Albatross, ball, tee, and beverage cart sponsors for being our partners in healing and championing our mission.

Ace Sponsors: GI Joe Homes, IBEW Local 332, National Electrical Contractors Association - NECA, JEIF and Family Pet Care Center

Condor Sponsors: Brooks Automation, Weston Miles Architects, Ravenox

Albatross Sponsors: LWG Construction, "Gilroy Life", "Morgan Hill Life", Lokey Firearms

Ball Sponsor: The Ford Store Morgan Hill

Tee Sponsor: Accurate Printing & Promotions, Inc.

Beverage Cart Sponsor: The Vanity Vault Beauty Bar, Morgan Hill

OFP 2022 Upcoming Events

Your Participation Makes A Difference!

Sip, Bid, Bowl and Rock Out to Support Our Teams!

August 6th

11th Annual "Paws with Patriots" Wine Gala

OFP Canine Education Center

Raise a glass, raise a paddle and help us raise lifesaving funds for OFP service dog teams. The evening will be hosted by radio personality Jona Denz-Hamilton and Gilroy Chamber of Commerce President, Mark Turner. Supporters will enjoy wine, dinner, music by the OFP ALLSTARS featuring Bay Area favorite, Mikey Day, great silent and live auctions and more! It's a night not to be missed. Tickets are available now and selling out fast. Go onto our event platform at <https://pawswithpats22.givesmart.com> to buy tickets.



September 24th

OFP Bowling Tournament

Morgan Hill Bowl

Take to the lanes to empower our teams, grab some tickets for our prize drawings or bid on silent auction items while enjoying delicious baked goods. Tickets will go on sale soon.



October 7th

"Rockin Paws for a Cause" Concert benefiting OFP

Morgan Hill Community and Cultural Center

Enjoy a great night of live music featuring Steel Horse. There will be amazing local food trucks and beverage vendors. More event details and sponsorship opportunities will be announced soon.



October 22nd

National Pets for Vets benefiting OFP

J Winston Winery

Experience a day filled with great wines, live music with Brooke and Emil, drawings and a silent auction! There will even be a dog costume contest with prizes, so bring your dogs and get creative!



November 13th

Morgan Hill Veterans Day Run

Downtown Morgan Hill

The Morgan Hill Freedom Fest is proud to host the Veterans Day Run to honor the men and women who have served or are currently serving in the armed forces of the United States. Proceeds benefit veteran organizations including OFP.

