



Operation Freedom Paws

Four Paws, Two Feet, One Team

NOVEMBER 11, 2014

Q'4 2014 ISSUE

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 4

Operation Freedom Paws

777 First Street,
PMB 515
Gilroy, CA 95020
(408)847-8518

Find us online at:
operationfreedompaws.org



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

Founder's Message

Veterans Day is a time to remember all of the heroes who have served, and continue to serve, our great nation. Service may not always include combat, but honoring your commitment to fulfill any role in any branch of the U.S. military makes you a hero this Veterans Day. I encounter many veterans, especially women, who do not identify themselves as "veterans," because they were not under fire. Today we must honor not only those who gave their lives, but living veterans from WWII to the current conflicts. This includes anyone in harm's way defending our freedoms in places we may never hear about in the media. As the Government draws back the number of troops serving worldwide, it is extremely important to remember the sacrifices each of these men and women has made. So if you know anyone who has served in any capacity, please take the time today to thank him or her for serving our country. It does not matter if we won the war---it is about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all humanity.

Mary Cortani
Founder and President



Coretta Scott King Award



to offer the gift of independence to people struggling with disabilities.

On the evening of October 18th, Mary Cortani received the Coretta Scott King Award from the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Association of Santa Clara Valley. In the thirty-one years of the chapter's existence, Mary is only the fourth person to be honored with this prestigious award. We are very proud of her, and of her vision

Upcoming Events:

Thank you to all who have joined us this year at our many events. Please stay tuned for our upcoming 2015 schedule of events.



Meet Chris, Jasmine and April

What branch of the military were you in? Army

What was your rank? Sergeant

When and where did you serve? 2004-2013 and I was last stationed at Fort Bliss.

How did you learn about OFP? I learned through my former co-worker Tony Sitterly. He is a friend of Mary's; they used to work with search and rescue dogs together.

What about this program/process attracted you? Between the recommendation from Tony and the psychologist at the VA, they said this

might be a good idea to help and so I said I would give it a shot.

What was a typical day for you like before you were matched with your dog?

I went to work depressed. I didn't really go anywhere or have any desire to go anywhere. I wouldn't communicate well with my girlfriend Jasmine, or anyone else. I would stay inside my own head.

Was there anything about the idea of having a service dog that gave you concerns?

Chris: The only issue that came about was with the apartment we were in. The landlord and his wife were not too thrilled about it initially.

Jasmine: I was very skeptical about it. When he mentioned it to me, I was very closed off. I wanted to know "Why, why do we need a service dog in the house?" I thought it was only for people who were blind. So I had to be educated on all of that. I didn't want to go through the battle of our landlord who was not accepting of it at all and I couldn't understand it for the longest time so we even went to counseling over it because I could not see where Chris's need was for it. After a while of talking about it, we found a way to move forward together, not so much with getting a service animal, but how we were going to handle the landlord situation because I was worried about having a place to live.

Did Mary match you with April? If so, was there any hesitation to your relationship?

Chris: Yes, Mary picked April for me. It was love at first sight; granted you get handed a leash and told this is April. I knew nothing about her, except this is April--she wiggles and she wants to give you kisses and be on your lap. You are matched, you go through a little bit of training; you know how to make her sit, and lay down but other than that you are told to just get to know each other.

Jasmine: They had one day where it was a hard day. I think it was the second or third day that we had her at home and she wasn't responding quite well and so Chris wasn't responding well to that. So there was a day where I think he felt like he was failing as a handler and kind of didn't know really what to do, so I think at that time we reached out to Janet (a mentor trainer) and asked suggestions. After



Awards

2014 Coretta Scott King Award

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



that we took a day to relax and let it go and from there I think everything else went really smoothly.

What are some of the issues you face in trying to achieve your certification?

So far the only real challenge I have come across with her is she is VERY receptive to what is going on with me, to the point of if there is anything, any pain or if I am upset in any shape or form she stops and says, "nope". And it is the obedient-disobedience, "Fix yourself, then we will play again".

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

"Puppy yoga" is actually really useful for me, especially if I can catch myself in time, because it breaks the cycle in my head. And the confidence-building from being in the class and hearing what the right answers are, and learning from everybody else and their experiences. So when there is conflict with taking April here or there, it is easy to deal with without getting upset about it.



What are some of the challenges you face out in public?

Chris: Educating the public. I am a little more forgiving for "Mom and Pop" shops. I am more than happy to explain [the laws regarding service dogs] to you because you are a small business this is something you may not have come across. But to go into a major supermarket chain or a Six Flags---not so forgiving.

Jasmine: Because of the classes Chris is very calm and collected, but because I have not done the "What would you do? What would you say?" exercise, I feel like I am on edge. Our biggest issue was when we went to Six Flags, and we were sitting there trying to walk through security and they were so busy trying to figure out what they could ask us, and we were stopped in front of all of these people, so all of these people are staring now and want to know what is going on. More security officers come to the front, so now we have 4-5 security officers and for me I was frustrated, so I can only imagine how Chris was feeling. And then after all that, they didn't even check our bags. Here they were, supposed to be focused on security, but they were so concerned with April that they didn't even check our bags. It is just the lack of knowledge. As we were walking through the theme park they had people dressed up in costume, and some of these characters were following April and petting her. Chris handles it really well, but I want to turn around and say "What are you thinking?!"

How is your life different now with April?

Chris: She gets me out of my own head, which is great. She knows things are going to happen well before I do and she brings laughter back. So she will do something silly easily 5-10 times a day, whether it is being underneath my desk at work snoring so loud my customers could hear it or waking me up in the middle of the night, giving me this look of "I am cute, give me a belly rub now."

Jasmine: With regards to his mood and everything; before, anything could be a trigger so he would be angry maybe even aggressive in his word choice or activity choices. Where I feel like now, it doesn't even get to that level it doesn't get anywhere close to the level that it did before.



How have things changed for your family?

Chris: We kind of unite around April.

Jasmine: Yeah, April has kind of been that tie for us. It makes things a lot less stressful, because when he is having a hard day, it is not all on me. She takes that away, so it has been a lot easier for us. I feel like I can come over and talk to him and say I don't like the way your voice is right now, and he understands and brings it back down; whereas before if I even tried, it would blow up into something bigger. So with her around it has definitely been a lot easier.

Operation Freedom Paws Canine Education Center Grand Opening

Since the lease was signed in March, thousands of hours of hard work, much of it by volunteers, have gone into the brand-new Operation Freedom Paws Canine Education Center in San Martin. Situated on 4.2 acres in San Martin, the Center has an administrative building, two large warehouses for training, a pole barn for outdoor classes, agility and play yard for dogs, and a BBQ area for our families to gather. The grass is sprouting in an area which soon will be perfect for flyball!

On October 17th, 2014 we had the official ribbon-cutting ceremony with representatives from both the Gilroy and Morgan Hill Chambers of Commerce. The Grand Opening celebration for the public on October 18th included a BBQ, facility tours and games for all to enjoy. This new location has space for us to foster rescued dogs who are waiting for their "match" among our applicants, and allows us to increase the size of our service-dog and obedience training sessions. In addition, we will offer doggie daycare and boarding to the public. Revenue from these services will directly fund OFP's non-profit services for veterans, adults and children with disabilities. If you were unable to attend the grand opening, please contact info@operationfreedompaws.org to schedule a tour.

We are Hiring!

Do you LOVE working with dogs and their owners? Or know someone who does? Apply to be a Kennel Technician at [Indeed](https://www.indeed.com).



Fundraiser Roundup



This has truly been a quarter of collaboration!

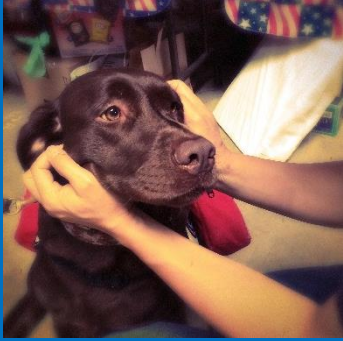
On August 23rd, we again partnered with DreamPower Horsemanship for our annual "Hoofs and Woofs" Fundraiser. This year we put on a motorcycle poker run, which brought out new volunteers and supporters. With this event, we were able to introduce ourselves to a different demographic, and share with them the missions of both Operation Freedom Paws and DreamPower Horsemanship.

Our audience has expanded; and so has our sphere of influence.

Our own "Paws with Patriots Wine Gala" fundraiser on September 13th raised \$12,968, thanks to the collaboration of corporate sponsors, generous donors, dedicated patrons, and passionate volunteers. We successfully changed the venue for this event to The Mountain Winery in Saratoga, CA with its scenic views of Silicon Valley.

Because of everyone's generosity and hard work, our 2014 combined fundraisers earned over \$50,000. Thank you to all who have helped and/or contributed! With these funds we are able to cover the cost of four new service dog teams. Every dollar earned from our events goes directly into our program to benefit a service dog team. So heading into the season of giving we ask that you consider Operation Freedom Paws as your charity of choice. With your donation you will be giving a dog a home, and changing a person's life to provide the gift of independence and a "new normal".





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. All proceeds will benefit OFP's nonprofit program.
- Traveling? Working? Our new daycare and boarding services for the public also benefit OFP's nonprofit program. We have dedicated staff on hand 24/7 to make sure the dogs in our care have a great experience with us!
- Have time to volunteer? There are youth and adult volunteer opportunities. Contact Volunteer Coordinator Michelle Beasley at info@operationfreedompaws.org
- 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 OFP 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, follow us on Twitter and share our posts with your friends!

