



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

We have seen enormous success with clients who have been, and are currently going, through the Operation Freedom Paws program. I attribute this to our team's evaluation, re-evaluation and expansion of the services we offer to clients---especially our veterans---and their family members. We truly attempt to heal the whole soul, giving them the tools to make a lasting change.



have put their life on the line for our freedoms---deserve more.

The need of our veterans is critical. Never in my life did I want to have a waiting list for this program. Unfortunately we have one over a year and a half long because the need is so great, and budget is such a major factor. We want to expand and help those with a need, because the benefits of both having a service dog and going through our 48-week program are countless. Things that we take for granted every day, like going to a grocery store, taking your daughter to a play or going to see a movie in a theater are things that a disabled person may not be able to do alone. Veterans---men and women who

You can see in this and previous newsletters the successes our clients have achieved by participating in OFP's program, and the benefits their service dogs provide. Here at OFP we do not just talk about wanting to do more, we attempt to actually DO more. The number of veterans and first-responders coming forward with injuries and disabilities is increasing. Families fighting to help their disabled children, and who are turned away from traditional organizations, also need our help. We want to be here for them all.

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](#).

I want to sincerely thank you for your support, and ask you to reach a little deeper, and do a little more to help us support these men, women and children. We cannot do this without your financial support. All of your donations go directly into the program to help make a difference, whether it's a gas card so someone can come to class, veterinary services or equipment or food for their dog, or lunch with a group at Old City Hall Restaurant to get someone out in public to find the confidence they need to eventually do it on their own. Most clients come back even after they "graduate", because we have built a supportive, caring community. Join our community and support them!



Mary Cortani
Founder and President

Clara Barton Volunteer Award

The American Red Cross of the Central Coast will be honoring our founder, Mary Cortani, at its 2016 Real Heroes Breakfast on Friday, June 17. Doors open at 8 a.m. and the program will begin at 8:30 a.m. at the Twin Lakes Church in Aptos.

Each year at the breakfast, the Central Coast Chapter salutes local community members in Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito Counties whose courageous actions exemplify the values of the Red Cross. Mary was chosen for the Clara Barton Volunteer award because of her creation of a truly collaborative solution aiding American combat veterans dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. According to the American Red Cross, "OFP's approach does so much more than provide canine companionship for veterans, it gives them a sense of mission and purpose—and as training proceeds, it gives them a sense of accomplishment and renewed confidence."

We are honored that the American Red Cross of the Central Coast has recognized Mary for her outstanding contributions to our veterans and their families. If you would like to join the breakfast, tickets are available for purchase [here](#).



Awards

2016 Clara Barton
Volunteer Award

2015 KSBW Central
Coast Jefferson
Award

2015 Golden Rule
Award

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



Veteran's Voice—Meet Emilio and Samson

Beginning with this edition of our newsletter, we will feature the impact of the OFP program from a “Veteran’s Voice”. We will be following this client through his journey here at OFP, giving you a perspective that we staff members cannot personally describe. Here is Emilio and Samson’s Journey:



“I had submitted an application to Operation Freedom Paws a little more than half a year before I was contacted about coming in for an initial interview, and through the waiting process I would often wonder what it would be like if I would get accepted into the program, sometimes speaking out scenarios with my teenage daughter, and other times just imagining to myself what my life would be like with a service dog. There were so many questions that I had, so many ideas of how things might be, and I was excited at the opportunity that was lying ahead of me.

After an initial interview with Janet on the morning of Tuesday the 16th of February, I immediately felt welcomed to the OFP family. Although I seemed like a great candidate for the program, and despite ending this first conversation with a big hug from Janet, I still needed to set up a meeting with Mary, and as she happened to be experiencing some medical issues during this time, that meeting was temporally put on hold while she recovered. In the meantime, Janet reached out to me once again, encouraging me to come down to OFP to sit in on some of the classes and possibly get some time in working with an unmatched dog at the facility. As it worked out, due to some busyness with my full load of college courses, I was unable to make it back down to OFP until Saturday March 5th, which worked out great because Mary was back into the swing of things, although probably not 100%. We were able to step into the administration building after the Saturday morning class got underway, and Mary and I were finally able to speak and complete our interview process...and the rest as they say, is history.

The following excerpts are exact journal entries from my first official day as a part of Operation Freedom Paws:

Saturday, March 5, 2016

I believe Mary said #7 or #17 to Janet, then had another member of the OFP staff get that dog from the kennel. Mary then handed me a snack pouch with a belt and explained to me where the proper placement of that pouch was. After a few nervous minutes sitting in a chair next to the long table which we were speaking at,

there was a knock at the door, and in scurried an excited black bundle of energy, and Mary said, "This is Samson." It felt awesome knowing that all of his energy formed what was like an invisible funnel, from the door to the chair that I was sitting in. We got acquainted for a few minutes, then Janet walked us through the building where that morning's classes were going on, to the back corner, and began working on some basic walking commands with us. After a short while we joined the group working on the ground floor, and I was a bit nervous about fitting in, and Samson probably sensed it.

Our first day working together:

Samson was very intrigued by everything around him, all of the other dogs, and all of the noises. As we were walking in the circle with the rest of the class Samson didn't want to move at my command, so Janet had us take a seat on one of the nearby chairs for about ten or fifteen

minutes. During the next break Janet let me know that Samson was already getting a sense of who I am and what is happening inside of my body, and his refusal to get up from his sit was his way of letting me know that something is going on with me, which was probably the nervousness and anxiousness I was feeling trying to fit in on our first day.



Also, during puppy yoga, Mary came over and sat next to me and explained why Samson suddenly got really active in the middle of it, jumping up onto my lap a few times. She said he was trying to tell me to relax and calm down, and in her words, "He's telling you that you're in a safe place."

It was good to talk with a couple of the other guys in the class, specifically Mike. He sought me out and struck up a conversation, and shared a lot of good information with me after everyone else had left the building. Janet made that connection during a break in the class earlier in the morning, introducing me to Denny and Abbey, and Mike and Reba. It was good to not only immediately feel welcomed and loved by the

OFP staff, but to also feel an immediate connection of brotherhood and a common bond meeting fellow veterans in the program for the first time."

Tiny House Update: A Sneak Peek in Design

“A One of a Kind Bathroom” By Brianna

“My specific job is the wet bathroom design, a task that has proven to be quite challenging. Irrefutably the hardest part was finding light-weight materials for a bathroom—no tile, marble or any other common bathroom walling. For months we have gone back and forth on design—from vinyl sheets, to bamboo, to a full fiberglass shell, to our current design. Finally, we were able to get an accurate finalized look of the bathroom.

After having made multiple trips to Home Depot, and doing extensive research online, our wet bathroom team finally decided on a design. For those who are unfamiliar, a “wet” bathroom is a normal bathroom—except that there is no shower pan. The whole floor is designed to get wet, resulting in no difference in flooring throughout the whole bathroom. After much deliberation on costs-benefit analysis, we have come to decide on a customized fiberglass pan that will rise up shortly on the wall. For the walling, we will use waterproof paneling that will go over the lip of the fiberglass pan. The aesthetics of the bathroom we are looking into are glass corner shelves and a mirror. The biggest challenge in designing was choosing a design that college students can build. Sloping can become quite complicated with a circular drain, so we had initially decided to do a trough drain.

However, we realized quickly that this drain would run into the joists underneath the house. This made us reconsider our decision, and we came to agreement on a circular drain, in light that we have a friend that can assist in the sloping of the bathroom. Overall, the bathroom should be a solid shell for the flooring, with lighter colored wall panels.

Today, one of the team leaders announces to us that they are changing the dimensions of the bathroom. These next two weeks, we will be revisiting our calculations to account for this change. It may be a bit hard, since the room isn't perfectly rectangular anymore, yet we will make sure to get the job done right!”



A Table Affair 2016



As many may recall, OFP was the beneficiary of the 2015 “A Table Affair” in Pebble Beach. This year, although we were not the featured charity, we were invited back to decorate a table to represent OFP. Our very fabulous and dedicated supporter/volunteer Phyllis Pierce designed a lovely table setting with OFP’s mission as its theme. Set for high tea with Phyllis’s Prince Albert china on gold chargers, the beautifully-folded napkins were adorned with OFP logo pins. In the center of each dinner plate was a gold doily with a picture of a veteran and

service dog. For the finishing touch, Phyllis’s niece made paw-shaped cookies for us to give away. Each one was frosted with either a paw print or the OFP logo, and packaged with an OFP business card.

We truly appreciate the invitation to be a part of an event that allows us to interact with a community so passionate about their veterans. Thank you to Averil Nero who invited us back; thank you to our clients who showed up to engage with the community that day; thank you to Phyllis’s niece for her baking artistry, and thank you to Phyllis who planned the whole table and made it a real show-stopper.



Chili Cook Off 2016

People came out to enjoy a fiery competition among our public-service men and women in the area as they supported OFP! This third-party fundraiser benefitted allowed the public to enjoy an afternoon with great chili, live music and education about our local non-profit. Static displays from the local fire and police departments lined the street, while JJ Hawg played in front of the Gilroy VFW. This will be an annual event to benefit OFP so if you missed it this year, be sure to keep an eye and ear out for next year.

Golf Tournament

Our annual golf tournament was on May 20, 2016 at Eagle Ridge Golf Course. 32 golfers brought their smiles and competitive edges to the course ready to tackle the gale-force winds.

Thank you as always to Macquarie for being our match sponsor again this year! We truly appreciate their support every year, as the doubling of donations has a huge impact on our ability to fulfill our mission.



Thank you to Eagle Ridge for hosting us again, and thank you to all of our sponsors. The Ford Store Morgan Hill was a Condor sponsor this year. Local sponsors were Family Pet Care Center, Real Estate Solutions, Shadow Operations LLC, Articulate Solutions, Mobile Wash & Grooming Services, Visiting Angels Gilroy, Wenzholz Electric and JB Trophies.

And thank you to Pi Silverstein for the wonderful photography and string game!

Upcoming Events

We are looking forward to you joining us for all of our many upcoming events!

June 22nd—Join us for our 15% Testarossa Winery Community Fundraiser at the 107 Wine Bar.

July 16th—Get your running shoes on for our annual joint Hoof & Woof Fundraiser at Harvey Bear Park! [Register here.](#)

August 10th—Join us again, for our 15% Testarossa Winery Community Fundraiser at the 107 Wine Bar.

August 13th—Come on out to our annual Wine Gala at the OFP Canine Education Center; [Register EARLY](#), as this is a sell out event!



How you can help

- Traveling? Working? Our 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!
- We offer obedience 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.
- Have time to volunteer? There are youth and adult volunteer opportunities. Contact us at Volunteer@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 OFP.
- 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!
- Call or email *Able Auto Charity Donation Corporation* to donate a vehicle. Tell them you'd like a percentage of the proceeds to go to Operation Freedom Paws. These 5-star folks are friendly, helpful, and have contacts nationwide.
- Like us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter and share our posts with your friends!

