

OPERATION **FREEDOM** PAWS



S U P P O R T I N G O F P I N 2 0 1 7



THE KEY TO THE LOCK

LENDING A PAW SO HEALING CAN BEGIN

Recently I have been reminded of how unique our program is. We truly treat each client as an individual, because no two clients are the same. This approach requires that we constantly evolve and expand our resources and services. As mentioned in past newsletters, we have forged new relationships to help provide healing moments when things “click” for our clients, and keep them on track to move forward. These relationships are possible because our staff is vigilant about researching new methodologies, policy changes that affect those with disabilities, and identifying other groups that provide services which align with our mission. Whenever possible, we partner with these organizations to give our clients the best resources and experiences to help them on the journey to their new normal. The dogs are the key that opens the lock so healing can begin. Our team then provides additional tools to help complete the healing process. We never know throughout the course of the program when a healing moment is going to occur for an individual. When it does, it's magical! Everyone at Operation Freedom Paws shares in the rewarding experience, knowing that we have saved two lives in the process.

-Mary Cortani
Founder & Executive Director

HELP OFP SAVE LIVES!

JOIN US AT ONE OF OUR MANY UPCOMING FUNDRAISERS

In order to continue our innovative way of saving lives, we rely on funds from donors and money from our fundraising events. Please review our upcoming events, both direct and third-party planned, listed below:

OFP CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT



Every May we ask foursomes to have a great time golfing while they support an even greater cause. The beautiful Eagle Ridge Golf Course will again be the venue on May 26th. This is our 7th annual charity golf tournament, and it is always a fun time for all. So grab three of your closest friends and play hooky that Friday for a day of golfing at one of Silicon Valley's premier courses, and supporting OFP's veterans!

Learn more and register [online](#) today!

OFP ANNUAL WINE GALA

This year will be our 5th annual "OFP Paws with Patriots" Wine Gala. We have hosted a sell-out crowd for the past two years, and expect the same again on August 12th. The Old City Hall Restaurant will be catering this event at OFP's Canine Education Center. Our guests will enjoy dinner, wine, auctions, and live music. All proceeds will support the Operation Freedom Paws program. This would be a great date night, or a perfect evening to introduce your friends to OFP's mission.



Learn more and register [online](#) today!

THIRD-PARTY FUNDRAISERS

COMMUNITY SUPPORTERS RAISING FUNDS FOR OUR CAUSE

A Table Affair 2017: "Salute to Service Dogs"--Thursday, May 4th

Come and enjoy fifty beautifully decorated tables at The Inn at Spanish Bay's main ballroom from 2pm-6pm. The tables are created by local individuals and organizations. Complimentary refreshments and cash bar at the event. No admission charge and reservations are not required.

Chili Champions 2017--Saturday, June 10th

Come see the battle heat up between local law enforcement, fire fighter and EMS for chili bragging rights! Enjoy live music by JJ Hawg, face painting, service vehicle displays and delicious BBQ dishes for purchase in addition to the chili tasting at the Gilroy VFW on 6th St from 12pm to 3pm. Keep an eye out for registration details on our website!

City Scamper: Gilroy--Saturday, July 15th

Teams will be given a list of 12-15 clues. Each clue will take you to a different location where you will complete a dare, collect an item or take a photo or video. Teams can only walk, run, or use public transportation to get around. At checkpoints with dares, you must accomplish a task that may include jumping rope or learning a dance. [Register](#) Today!

UPDATE FROM OUR "VETERANS VOICE" TEAM: EMILIO & SAMSON

VETERAN: U.S. MARINE CORPS

You could probably say that my initial thoughts about adding a service dog to my life were what most people think about change...I wanted to see if it was something that could improve the quality of my life, but I was skeptical about getting out of my comfort zone. Looking back at the beginning of this journey, it's hard to even imagine my life without Samson right in the middle of it. I'm sure most people who have taken on service dogs for whatever reason applicable would say the same thing, and although that answer may seem like a thoughtless response or maybe even an overused cliché, the depth of those words mean so much to me, and I'm sure they would mean the same for Samson.

To be transparent and honest, there were some moments about half a year in that I doubted this could work for me, that taking on this much responsibility was causing me to deal with more anxiety and stress than I wanted to...then one day, something clicked...something happened. Like ripples in a lake disappearing as a once airborne rock sinks to its bottom, my waters became calm, and standing on its edge I could hear the birds whistle again. I could hear leaves rustle in the light winds, and my shoulders dropped, resting... and there the occasional breathing of my Samson brought comfort to my moments.

I talk to Samson like I would talk to both of my children... and I tell him that I love him just as much. I feel his love as he places a paw on my arm during random moments when I touch him or pet him, and I hope that I bring comforts to his days just the same, because there can't be any selfishness in a team. Teamwork makes the dream work they say, and our dream seems to be moving along quite well. Something about having someone to love and feel that same love back no matter the time or place, no matter what is going on, it's there...and it's always there. It's energizing to have Samson always so excited to interact with me.



Without a doubt, I know that Samson's presence in my life has caused my body to change chemically. My love for him has definitely brought about something different, and has introduced new emotions to my days. Emotions that bring life back into the empty moments, and bring comfort to the times when I want to pull myself away from everything around me.



It's not always easy, life with anxiety and withdrawal as a common coping mechanism, but Samson always brings me back to the world...in his way, not mine. I've learned over years that my ways aren't always the best ways, and I've learned to trust him in knowing what is the best for me, even if it's just a subtle, "Come lay on the floor next to me for a few minutes, Dad," look.

Samson stands in the gap for me, as a buffer between the world and I...always with my best interests in mind, always full of love, and always happy and excited. As a single

father with practically two adult children, a soon to be 21 year old college son, and a 16 year old high school daughter, Samson brings dissipating companionship to my days. As a father since the age of 18, all I have known is life with them. Samson became a part of my life at what I feel is the perfect time, and I will always be thankful for that. Mary and Operation Freedom Paws have brought more value and reason to my once dark days. Four Paws, two feet, one team. (cont. pg.4)



Operation Freedom Paws
777 First St. PMB 515 | Gilroy, CA 95020
"Four Paws, Two Feet, One Team"

"VETERANS VOICE" TEAM: EMILIO & SAMSON (CONT.)

VETERAN: U.S. MARINE CORPS

To end this short piece, I'd like to share an important part of my life with you all. As an English major at San Jose State University with a concentration in creative writing, I am an avid writer of poetry. As a part of a group called Veterans Write, that exists outside of San Jose State, the two have come together to co-exist on campus because of my involvement, I will conclude my words here with a short poem inspired by my four-legged buddy some time last year. Written as a part of a workshop in March of 2016, the piece might someday take on more length, or possibly just remain as it is, and as of now it remains untitled.



Samson
My strength
You found me
Or did I find you?
I'd like to think that we found each other
In the midst of the noise
You say, "Look at me, I'm happy"
In the midst of the storm
The rain doesn't matter
Samson
My strength
My pillar
With a wagging tail
Tearing down columns
Of tension and empty stares
One face lick at a time