

OPERATION FREEDOM PAWS



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



FIFTH YEAR FINALE

THE "RIPPLE EFFECT"

As we close our fifth year as a non-profit and seventh year providing services to veterans and others with disabilities, our purpose has become greater and more relevant. While we have made significant strides as a young, small non-profit, there are still many hurdles to overcome in the future. We are looking to purchase the place we have come to call home, the Operation Freedom Paws Canine Education Center. This home was built with thousands of dollars in donated services and hours of volunteers' time. This is the place our OFP Family has called home for the past three years, and which we hope to call home for as long as our work is needed.

As we acquire this property, we must also maintain our services for our clients and their families. It is support from individuals like you that help us to continue our mission. Matching a service dog to a disabled client affects so many areas of their life and ultimately allows them the ability to achieve tasks that we all take for granted in our own daily lives. Every client's situation is unique and because of this we do not force our program to fit into a particular mold, but instead adjust our training accordingly for each individual case. We continuously reshape training for each client to improve that individual's quality of life. We teach new habits that allow clients to create their "new normal". With service dogs by their sides, they learn to have hope and confidence in their ability to navigate life again.
[Cont. pg.2]

FIFTH YEAR FINALE (CONT.)

THE "RIPPLE EFFECT"

The impact our donors and volunteers have on our clients is a part of why our program works so well; the ripple effect. Our donors and volunteers help us to continue providing services to our clients, allowing our clients to then contribute to their immediate family, extended family and the community in multiple ways. This ripple effect, along with the support our organization offers to our clients (even after they have graduated) is what sets us apart from traditional organizations. Every step forward we see our clients take with their dog by their side is cause for celebration. So, CHEERS to a successful five years---with your continued support, there will be many more to come!

--Mary Cortani
Founder & Executive Director

FIFTH YEAR MILESTONES

INCREASING THE IMPACT OF OUR MISSION

In July of this year, we finally received approval from the Santa Clara County Planning Commission for our conditional-use permit. This means we can continue to do the work we do, helping veterans and others with disabilities create their new normal by training their own service dogs. Although there are some items that need to be completed, we are happy to announce that the permit is signed off.

September 21st will mark the end of our fifth year as a nonprofit, so Mary added a goal she wanted reached before that year was up. We not only reached, but we exceeded it. In September of 2011 we had 34 clients in the program; two weeks ago we added our 304th service dog client! OFP's move in 2014 from a small rental warehouse to the current 4.2-acre property was a significant contributing factor to achieving this milestone.

Our next goal is to purchase the property we have been leasing. Our \$1/year 5-year lease is up in March of 2019. By then we hope to have negotiated a purchase price and secured funding to buy the OFP Canine Education Center. We look forward to the day when we own the property we call home---where so many volunteer and staff hours have been spent creating a sanctuary to allow OFP's current and future service dog clients to learn, thrive, and create their "new normal".



"SUMMER FUN"-DRAISERS

EVENTS TO HAVE FUN WHILE RAISING FUNDS FOR OFP

This summer we hosted two of our largest annual fundraisers; The OFP Golf Tournament and OFP "Paws with Patriots" Wine Gala. We have all of you, our supporters, to thank for their success!

Our OFP Golf Tournament, held on May 26th at Eagle Ridge Golf Course, was put on by longtime supporter and volunteer Trillian Hamilton. Everyone had a fun day in the sun golfing in Gilroy.



Our annual "Paws with Patriots" Wine Gala took place on August 12th at the OFP Canine Education Center. This was another year with a sell-out crowd and incredible support from our community. Dinner was donated by Old City Hall Restaurant; wines were donated by Rapazzini Winery, Morgan Hill Cellars, Hellam's Tobacco & Wine Shop, Purple Heart Wines, and Guglielmo Winery. Beer was donated by Gordon Biersch Brewery. Kbay's Jona Denz-Hamilton emceed

the event, with local Gilroy Chamber of Commerce President, Mark Turner, as auctioneer.

The highlight for many of our clients and guests was the opportunity to meet celebrity guest Jane Lynch. She drove up from Hollywood to attend our event, and graciously navigated the crowd to allow founder Mary Cortani introduce her to many of our clients and service dogs who attended the event. It was a joy to have Jane Lynch in the crowd and we thank her for taking time from her busy schedule to be at this year's event!

In June, OFP was the beneficiary of the second Annual Gilroy CHP Vs. Fire Chili Cook Off at the Gilroy VFW. This was a great time for friends and family to enjoy wonderful chili and friendly competition between our public service men and women. We would like to thank Chris Micelli and The El Camino Club for putting on this event the last two years!

On November 4th in Vallejo, CA, Faith Hazeltine will put on her third annual "50th 5k fun run/walk extravaganza" to benefit OFP. This is a fun event for friends and family of all ages to come out and support OFP and our mission.

Keep an eye out for our upcoming 2018 events calendar!



TAIL-WAGGIN' TRIUMPHS

TESTIMONIALS FROM SOME OF OUR GRADUATED TEAMS

"Operation Freedom Paws (OFP) has given me my life back. Prior to being matched, I led a life of fear/anxiety and depression. I was in and out of hospitals (including 51/50). I stayed in Kaiser for eleven programs with little to no success.

I was skeptical about a service dog and was researching private programs that required a \$50,000 investment. Then I met Mary, she was able to match Bochy and I quickly. From that moment everything changed for me.

I can go out with confidence, hold down a job, and be pro-active with my new companion. Thank you Mary and OFP for giving my life back to me!"

--Roger & Bochy



"I was in ICU at Stanford Behavioral Medicine Center Sept. 2013, when a young 20-something year old woman walked through with a service dog. I was instantly drawn to her and as I approached her and her dog, the dog had an OFP vest on. I looked up OFP as soon as I got home. I sent my application in right away and due to smaller facilities at the time, I waited over ten months before I got the first call. That call was the start to a new life.

I have worked very hard many times in my life to be prepared so I could be able to participate in various learning/training opportunities. I've never been more committed to any previous opportunity than I have with OFP. In fact, as soon as I was accepted into the program ALL of my doctors saw a big, positive shift. My life is totally changed today from getting Bella and training with her at OFP. I am more healthy on every level and will forever be grateful to Mary, Janet, Bobby, Jeff and the entire OFP organization."

--Dixon & Bella

MEET JANET & CLOVER

ONE OF OUR OFP MENTOR TRAINERS AND HER PEANUT ALERT DOG

I met Clover at the Berkeley Animal Care Center shelter in March of 2011. She was my wild, crazy, leash-climbing "assignment". I had volunteered to handle a pit bull from the shelter at BAD RAP's weekly classes, train it, and make it adoptable by someone (else). Despite her progress with obedience, in the 5 months volunteers and staff worked with her, Clover could not overcome her reactivity to other dogs. She was a vicious fence-fighter who would wait for the two dogs on either side of her kennel to bark, and then she'd go nuts. To someone who hadn't experienced Clover's affectionate, sweet side, it was terrifying. It was even more terrifying when she would suddenly react to dogs outside the kennel when she was on leash. Shelter staff knew she needed a very strong handler and a lot more training. With the wrong person, Clover could create big problems. They called to tell me that she would be euthanized in three days unless I wanted to adopt her. I was grateful for their confidence. On July 11, 2011, the day Clover was due to be put down, I brought her home.



That September, Clover and I enrolled in the Operation Freedom Paws obedience class, learning together with veterans and other people with service dogs. As an OFP customer (and soon a volunteer), I enthusiastically supported the mission. Though I had a dog by my side, I knew I was on a different path, focusing on resolving Clover's dog-reactivity and helping other students recognize that she was not a threat to people. Over time, Mary helped me achieve those goals as we taught Clover to use her nose and focus on me. I was trying to find a way to put Clover's boundless energy to good use when someone mentioned an encounter with a peanut-detection dog. In November of 2012, I asked Mary if we could train Clover to alert me to peanuts. Mary said Clover would have to become my service dog, not just my pet. I knew from being around clients how much work and time was involved. I felt that I didn't "deserve" to have a service dog. I had been coping for years without one, and I didn't want to occupy a spot that would prevent a veteran in need from joining the program. I had multiple conversations with Mary, and weighed my options for days before deciding to make the commitment.

I've been allergic to peanuts my entire life. I vividly remember my first reaction; I was under three at the time. When I was a kid, I'd just throw up if I ate something with peanuts, but as I got older, the reactions worsened. I was in high school on a city bus when I had my first serious reaction---my skin got about an inch thick with hives, my eyes swelled almost shut and I was having trouble breathing. [Cont. Pg. 6]

MEET JANET & CLOVER (CONT.)

ONE OF OUR OFP MENTOR TRAINERS AND HER PEANUT ALERT DOG

Strangers on the bus kept asking me if I was OK. I was utterly mortified. I got off the bus two stops early and walked the remaining blocks home where I could just be alone to deal with it. I had carefully read the ingredients on the candy bar I got from the vending machine, and peanuts were not listed. I can remember the details of almost every reaction I've had since then...each worse than the last.

Until recently, I did not realize how much this allergy has affected my life, because it has just always been there. In school, I was sometimes sent to the nurse's office---but more often to the principal's office. I've been accused of faking, told it was "all in my head", told that everyone outgrows it and I couldn't possibly be allergic any more, and been embarrassed in front of relatives, friends and work colleagues at restaurants and potlucks more times than I can count. Restaurants change chefs and recipes; family members and friends don't realize, don't understand, or just forget. I've never actually been able to relax and enjoy a meal I didn't cook myself until after I've tasted everything. My allergist says I'm "exquisitely allergic". (I was happy to learn there's something about me that's "exquisite"---although I wish it could be something more desirable!)



The parent of a teenager told me her daughter had been hospitalized three times---not for her peanut allergy, but for the anxiety associated with it. That conversation, along with my exposure to people in OFP's service dog program, helped me understand that a food allergy as severe as mine causes a type of PTSD: it requires constant vigilance, it affects my relationships with people, it dictates if and where I can and cannot go and how I travel, it worsens with every reaction, and it will never go away. Every time I start to experience symptoms, I think, "Will this be the episode that kills me?" I realized I had more in common with OFP's other service dog clients than I imagined, and that I DID "deserve" to have a different kind of life with a service dog by my side.



Mary began our training by helping me teach Clover to recognize the scent of peanuts and get excited about it. Naturally, Clover wanted to eat the peanuts, so first we taught her to leave them alone and come directly to me for a treat from the pouch on my hip. Very quickly, she started jumping to grab at the treat pouch when she caught the scent. The following week, someone donated a large plastic bin of kibble that Clover kept trying to sniff. I looked inside, and saw nothing peanut-related, but she continued to pull me toward that bin. After two weeks of this, I finally asked Mary to see if I had missed something that Clover was scenting. With the kibble was a closed plastic bag. Inside the bag was a sealed box. Inside the box was a sealed bottle. One of the ingredients listed on the box, way down near the bottom of the list, was peanut oil. That's when I started to trust my dog.

MEET JANET & CLOVER (CONT.)

ONE OF OUR OFF MENTOR TRAINERS AND HER PEANUT ALERT DOG



Clover has told me about the peanut butter cookies a friend mistakenly included in my Christmas tin; which kids in the many school presentations we've done had peanut-butter sandwiches for lunch (even if they washed their hands); and allowed me to fearlessly attend a holiday fair where candy samples were being handed out. Her alerts are now quite refined. They involve her bowing gracefully after scenting a person's feet, and looking pointedly at the hip where my treat bag goes---whether or not I have it with me. Her alerts vary depending on the amount of peanuts involved, and her relationship with the "contaminated" person. With strangers, she will do a drive-by sniff of their shoes, ignore them, then make intense eye contact with me, as if to say, "Don't trust this one!" With friends, she acts differently. She will

greet them with inappropriate enthusiasm, even occasionally jumping up and kissing them, which she knows is not acceptable for service dogs. The first time this happened, I was mystified (and annoyed!) While my friend Dyan and I were discussing this odd behavior and what might be causing it, Clover was actually pushing her farther away from me and blocking her at the knees so she physically could not move forward. Dyan and I usually hug as soon as we see each other. After Clover's reaction, Dyan realized that about three hours before, she had given her dog medication hidden in peanut butter, and licked her fingers, too. Had I given her the usual hug, some residue might have ended up on my skin and caused hives. Clover's reactions cause me to ask questions. She doesn't waste energy alerting when we walk by the peanuts in the grocery store; she knows they're not a threat to me because I'll never pick them up---but sometimes I get a "puleeez, mom!" eye-roll from her when I try to get her to react---she knows I'm testing her!

Clover's metamorphosis from reactive shelter dog to highly trained service animal has been an incredibly rewarding journey for me. It has also required many thousands of hours of training, and a LOT OF LUCK! This work requires a particularly unusual skillset from a dog. I was extremely lucky that Clover had, (buried underneath her dog-reactiveness and insecure shelter demeanor), the temperament, ability and desire to be my peanut alert dog....not just any dog would have been able to take on this job and totally rock it like she has. With Mary's constant guidance of both of us, Clover now fills the position perfectly. [Cont. Pg. 8]





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

MEET JANET & CLOVER (CONT.)

ONE OF OUR OFP MENTOR TRAINERS AND HER PEANUT ALERT DOG



Every OFP handler has different issues, but we also have much in common. Like any person with a well-trained service dog, I am able to live a more normal life with Clover at my side. Her metamorphosis from reactive shelter dog to highly trained service animal has been an incredibly rewarding journey. My relationship with her is very special; our bond grows daily as we continue learning to work more effectively together. As Mary Cortani says, "Everything, every day is a training opportunity, and training never ends!"

Learn More about Operation Freedom Paws and how you can help online!
Our website is www.OperationFreedomPaws.org
or follow us on Twitter: @opfreedompaws & Facebook: /OperationFreedomPaws