

# OPERATIONFREEDOMPAWS



OPERATION FREEDOM PAWS IN 2023



## *A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER, MARY CORTANI*

At the end of this third quarter, we have lots to celebrate and lots to worry about. Our worries or concerns have to do with pushing, making it through another year, weathering the storm of uncertainty of the world around us, and the impact it could have. While all of this is going on we know and see the need to keep doing what we do every day. Trauma is trauma; it changes the brain of the individual who has experienced the event or events. Then there's the secondary effects to family and friends, the ripple effect of the trauma. My other concern is this continued debate about whether service dogs really make a difference and those who believe more research is needed. Research is important, however so is opening your eyes, talking to those who have survived and not just live but thrive today because of their service dog. They have learned to trust and believe that tomorrow will be better than today.

So even with these concerns I too believe tomorrow will be better than today, and therefore chose to celebrate our achievements in Q3. We celebrate 12 years as a nonprofit!

In a time of uncertainty and change, we are working to evolve and enhance our relationships. We could use your help. What is it that you, our social media and newsletter readers want to know about? We would love to grow our audience, engagement and support so we can continue to do what we do every day.

Q3 of 2023 has been quite the quarter. We had our Wine Gala, celebrated 12 years as a nonprofit, and almost 14 years of doing what we do. We've engaged in more conversations through presentations and had a screening of Vicki Topaz's film "By My Side".

As we move into the last quarter of the year, please consider Operation Freedom Paws for your year-end giving - consider doing peer to peer fundraising for OFP. We need your help. It is so frustrating to see the amount of dollars that go to political campaigns and here we are fighting to save the lives of our veterans, first responders and children, as well as enhance the lives of their families. How can we get more people to understand what we do and care enough to give and hopefully provide support on a regular basis? Our clients need us to provide lifesaving support, and WE NEED YOU to help us be there for them.

Please count your blessings; don't let fear of the uncertain world control you. Smile at someone you don't know, hold a door for a stranger, and most of all Be Kind. Try not to judge, you never know what kind of day someone has had.

Together we can make a real difference.

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

# Veteran Ramon and His Service Dog Huey

“We Bonded Right Away”

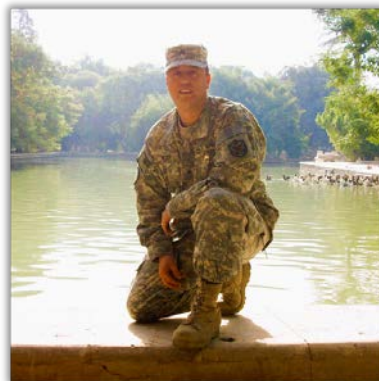
## An Article from the Purina Dog Chow Visible Impact Awards

After spending 17 years in the Army, military life was all Ramon knew. But when he was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury from events that occurred in Iraq, Ramon’s military career was cut short. And it took many years for the veteran to accept the fact that he was disabled.

“There are many casualties of war that go unnoticed, unappreciated, or unacknowledged, and I really felt like one of them,” says Ramon. “I speak from my own experience when I say that the unseen wounds that so many of us carry can be, and are, just as deadly as an IED or mortar round. The difference is that I was trained to defend myself from these man-made weapons. But when it came to the aftermath of what went on in my mind, I stood defenseless.”

Fortunately, with the help of Operation Freedom Paws (OFP), Ramon WOULD eventually receive the tools and training to help battle his inner turmoil. And the key to this was his service dog Huey. From the moment Ramon met Huey at OFP, the pair had an incredible bond. “Huey came up to me right away and hugged me. Then he jumped into my lap and just sat quietly,” says Ramon. “We bonded right away.”

After their pairing, Ramon and Huey continued formal training together for the next year — time which enabled the service dog to really understand the nuances of Ramon’s behaviors and physiology and know when Ramon is in a good place or when he’s in need of assistance. For example, symptoms of Ramon’s TBI include both dizzy spells and intense migraines. With dizzy spells, Ramon says, “Huey can detect when a spell is coming on by smelling the changes in my body chemistry.” When this happens, the service dog will go and stand right in between Ramon’s legs to hold him up and help him balance. And sure enough, within a matter of seconds, Ramon will start to get dizzy, and Huey will already be right there in place to balance him.



Huey is also able to smell when Ramon is going to get a migraine well in advance of when the migraine actually hits. Because of this, every morning Ramon has Huey smell him right when he wakes up. And if the service dog licks Ramon’s ear after smelling him, then Ramon knows he has a migraine coming and needs to take his medicine. “Because of Huey’s ability to do this, by the time my migraine hits, it’s just a mild headache rather than a full-blown debilitating migraine.”

The ways in which Huey has been able to mitigate Ramon’s PTSD and TBI symptoms have been infinite. The service dog can quell Ramon’s anxiety at home with a jump into his lap or a lick of his face. He can physically pull the veteran away from triggers in a public crowd. The chocolate lab was even able to detect a serious bleeding ulcer in the veteran before a doctor diagnosed it. But according to Ramon, out of all of Huey’s remarkable skills, perhaps the most critical one has been the service dog’s ability to play the role of family interpreter.

When Ramon first came back into civilian life, he was unable to open up to his family about anything. Ramon’s wife was struggling to find ways to help Ramon cope with his new challenges while raising their two children. But Ramon wouldn’t talk. Instead, when anyone in the family would inquire about him, he would lash out angrily.

# Veteran Ramon and His Service Dog Huey

## “We Bonded Right Away” (Cont’d)

But over time, little by little, the veteran began to open up to Huey. Many times, the service dog would remain quietly at Ramon’s side, providing judgment-free support. But other times, if the veteran was feeling really down, Huey would go right over to Ramon’s wife and begin nudging her to get her attention and then walk back towards Ramon to let his wife know that the veteran was in a bad place, and she needed to check in on him. Because of this forced interaction, Ramon eventually began to talk to his wife and children about his frustration with his situation and disabilities. “The biggest thing Huey has helped me to do is become the father and husband that I once was,” says Ramon. “With my pride, I would say I’m fine. I’m doing good,” says Ramon. “But Huey was like, ‘no, you’re not doing good’ and was letting me know. So all of his actions helped me to open up to my family and let them know what I was thinking.”

“I shut myself down from everyone; I pushed my family away. I had incredible anger. But ever since Huey has come into our lives, it’s gotten easier. Huey has awakened a part of me that has been dormant since my return from Iraq. Rather than isolating myself and pushing away my family, I’ve been able to do things with my wife and my kids. I’m able to enjoy myself again in their company.”

Today Ramon pays it forward as a mentor and trainer at Operation Freedom Paws where he is able to share his skills and experience with other veterans. “Every day is a struggle and I know life will never be the same,” says Ramon. “But with Huey, I can make the impossible possible. Now I can stand up tall, head held high and be able to say with pride, ‘I am a disabled veteran.’”



# Monique Reyes: The Program Through a Wife’s Eyes

## OFP’s Commitment to Family

Hi everyone, my name is Monique Reyes.

My journey with Operation Freedom Paws started in February of 2017. My family and I came into the program not realizing how much our lives would change forever. When day-to-day life became difficult for Ramon and my family due to his PTSD, Huey came into our lives and helped us as a whole to push forward in the healing journey. Before Huey, we were unable to enjoy amusement parks, grocery stores, and being around large groups of people, etc. Through the help of Mary Cortani and Operation Freedom Paws, we are now able to do the things we never thought were going to be possible again. Not only has Huey really helped our day-to-day life, but he saved my marriage to Ramon and our overall relationship as a family. Huey is a part of the Reyes family and we will always be grateful to him for saving our lives.



# Event Highlights

## The OFP 12th Annual "Paws with Patriots" Wine Gala

What a wonderful night! We raise a glass to everyone who made our fundraising efforts possible for the 12th Annual "Paws with Patriots" Wine Gala this year. Thank you to each and every one of you who bid, supported, donated and shared your talents and resources with us.



### Thank you to our Double Magnum Sponsor - Star One Credit Union

The employees, Board and Volunteers of Star One recognize the importance of contributing to the communities we serve and being a strong corporate citizen. Star One partners directly and indirectly with many different organizations throughout Santa Clara County and neighboring counties to support and provide resources through direct financial support, other in-kind contributions to organizations, and by participating in local public service activities.

## Empowering trust.

We are inspired by the veterans and individuals who find hope with the resources Operation Freedom Paws provides, and we are proud to be a long-time supporter.

[starone.org](http://starone.org)



### Thank you to our Magnum Sponsor - Piedmont Moving Systems

# PIEDMONT

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# OFP 2023 Upcoming Events

When You Participate, You Make a Difference!

## [OCTOBER 14, 2023 - OFP's 5th ANNUAL BOWLING TOURNAMENT](#)

Hosted By Morgan Hill Bowl and Donna Morales

Come join us for a great time on the lanes to benefit OFP! Bowl for fun with friends and family, or if you're a USBC member, bowl in the USBC Tournament with a prize fund! Tickets are \$38 for Fun Play (3 games) and \$55 for Tournament Play (3 Games). Bid or donate to bring home some great silent auction and drawing prizes like restaurant and escape room experiences, jewelry, sports gear, wine tastings, custom bowling jerseys, bowling balls, and much more! Bowlers can join us at either 10:00am or 2:00pm, your choice! Walk-Ins welcome.

Register here: <https://ofpbowling23.givesmart.com>



## [OCTOBER 21, 2023 – NATIONAL PETS FOR VETS DAY](#)

Hosted by J Winston Winery and Patty Skovron

Join us for a day of Carrasco Flavors BBQ, J Winston Winery, and live music by The Soft Lights. There will be a silent auction, drawing prizes, a photobooth, and an awesome dog costume contest! Don't miss out on all the fun! Bring your family, friends and dogs, Everyone is welcome! Event admission is free. Event starts at 1:00pm and ends at 5:00pm. Reserve a table by calling (669) 888-3222.

Not sure if you'll make it? Then join our virtual pet contest! Send J Winston Winery a photo and short bio of your pet to enter: [info@jwinstonwinery.com](mailto:info@jwinstonwinery.com). The contest will be live from Oct. 13th-20th! Dog, cat, bird, and more can enter this virtual pet contest!



## [NOVEMBER 9, 2023 – VETERANS DAY 2023 LAB RIDE 17 & BBQ](#)

Hosted By Veterans in Energy, Technology and Science and the Alameda Fire Department

Are you a rider? Take to the road with fellow riders in support of OFP for the 2023 Lab Ride 17. Every year for the past 16 years the Veterans in Energy Technology & Science and the Alameda County Fire Department have teamed up to host The Lab Ride. The Lab Ride is a motorcycle ride and BBQ event that brings together veterans and veteran supporters to raise funds for initiatives in the veteran community. This will be the second year in a row they will be riding for OFP. Ride details will be announced soon.



## [NOVEMBER 12, 2023 – MORGAN HILL VETERANS DAY RUN](#)

Hosted By Morgan Hill Freedom Fest

The Veterans Day 5k & 10k and 1 mile children's Run will honor the men and women who have served or are currently serving in the United States Armed Forces. You will have the opportunity to walk and run with these honorable men and women during the race and express your appreciation for their service as you finish the course with them. We encourage participants to take a moment and say, "Thank you for what you've done!" Small gestures mean a lot to those who have sacrificed so much. All proceeds from the race will go to veteran organizations including OFP. We hope to see you there! The event runs from 9:30am to 1:00pm.

Get registration fees and details here: [morganhillveteransdayrun.com](http://morganhillveteransdayrun.com)



# OFP Daycare & Boarding Kennel Talk

## Meet More of our Dedicated Team!

We received such great feedback from our “Kennel Talk” feature last month, that we wanted to give you the opportunity to get to know more of our wonderful kennel staff. Thank you to Lillian, Jordan, Claudia, Vanessa and Marissa for opening up and sharing their stories with all of us. We love that our team has such diverse gifts but share a passion for our mission and your dogs.

- Renee, Director of Operations

### LILLIAN - KENNEL TECHNICIAN LEAD

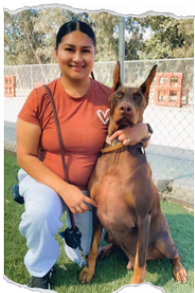
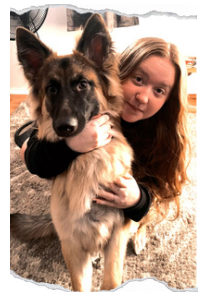
My name is Lillian and I have been working with OFP since the beginning of 2023. I joined OFP after a year-long hiatus of not working due to really bad burnout. Previous to my burnout, I worked in fast-paced environments, more specifically the medical field. It was only after my burnout there that I learned one of life’s most important lessons. Life needs balance - where slow-paced and fast-paced can coexist. After leaving my old job, I was pulled to a complete halt in my life where I suddenly wasn’t able to cope with fast-paced anything. I spent so many years working and doing things quickly that this became really hard for me. When COVID came around, like so many of us, I was able to take my break. However, life wasn’t going to wait for too long and I eventually had to come back to my daily responsibilities. When it came down to getting hired and rejoining the work field, I still felt so unsure of myself and there was much anxiety surrounding the question of, “if I can still do this or not”. Getting hired at OFP was a big milestone in my life. I wasn’t sure what to expect at a nonprofit but working here felt so different than any of the other jobs I had before. I was working towards something and not just for something. I love hearing and seeing our clients celebrating small victories in their lives because I too can relate. There is big pride in the small victory of something like getting a job after a year off, or a small victory like lasting longer than three minutes in a crowded supermarket. I hope that all our clients who pass through our facility are reminded that life is unique and despite what we are told and despite the pace of the world, it doesn’t always have to be fast; you can pause and go at your own pace.



### JORDAN - KENNEL TECHNICIAN

My name is Jordan. I am a Kennel Tech at OFP. Two of many things I love about my job are working with all of the dogs and my lovely co-workers that I enjoy being around and learning about 🐾🐾. I wish I learned of OFP sooner. I moved to California from a small town in North Carolina, I’ve always worked in animal care and loved and cared for animals since I was a little girl. When I was in middle school and high school, I was a part of every agricultural program (FFA) I could get into, to learn as much about animals as I could!!

During my free time I love to go on hikes, visit parks with my boyfriend and my dog, and FaceTime and chat with my family back in North Carolina. It’s a joy to be at OFP and meet you guys and all of your dogs; they bring so much joy and happiness into all of our hearts every day!!



### CLAUDIA - KENNEL TECHNICIAN

I have only been with OFP for a couple months and I have enjoyed every day of it. Not only do I get to work with amazing dogs with different wild personalities, but I have learned so much, and have grown more attached to each and every single one of them! I am also a mom of 3 wonderful children and 2 German Shepherds. On the weekends I like to get mommy duties done and have alone time with myself and a delicious iced/hot coffee!

# OFP Daycare & Boarding Kennel Talk

Meet More of our Dedicated Team! (cont'd)

## VANESSA - KENNEL TECHNICIAN

Hi everyone! I have been working with Operation Freedom Paws going on two months now. I am currently attending Arizona State University, in pursuit of my Bachelors in English Language and Literature. Working with Operation Freedom Paws has given me such a great opportunity to work with these dogs and create connections. I am forever grateful to Mary and the OFP family for welcoming me with open arms and allowing me to give back by providing a positive experience for the dogs here.



## MARISSA - KENNEL TECHNICIAN

I have recently joined OFP and have enjoyed working with all of the dogs and the team. Being able to work with animals has felt like a dream come true. I've loved animals my whole life, always lived with a cat or dog, and I used to ride horses. Working as part of the team at Operation Freedom Paws has been a really special experience, knowing that our work supports so much means a lot to me. When I'm not working, I love to sing and play guitar. I also give lots of cuddles to my cat, Josie. I like to crochet and knit, go to the beach, and spend time outside hiking whenever I get the chance.



## Ramon and Huey: Purina "Visible Impact Award" Finalist

Army Veteran Ramon and his Service Dog Huey

If you've been following our socials or receive our email updates, you know that Ramon and Huey are 1 of only 5 national finalists for the Purina "Visible Impact Award"! This award recognizes the profound role service dogs play in the lives of veterans and their families, the impact of which Ramon and Monique shared with you in this newsletter.











Now you can help bring hope and healing to another veteran and their family waiting for help. Please scan the QR code or click the hyperlink (digital only) to vote for Huey. It's free and takes just seconds! This is a popular vote, so we greatly appreciate a share with friends, family, and colleagues. If they win, Ramon and his family will personally receive \$10K and OFP will receive \$25K, which would fully fund a team in our program. There is only one vote allowed per email address throughout the contest. The voting ends 10/13 at 11:59:59 CT. We know with our amazing community we can make another lifesaving team possible!

Vote for Ramon and Huey here: [dogchowveterans.com](http://dogchowveterans.com), or scan the QR code below.



# There are so Many Ways to Help

Thank You!

<p><b>DONATE DIRECTLY</b> - Make a donation directly on the Network for Good website that comes straight to Operation Freedom Paws (OFP). To donate Scan the QR code or check out the website: <a href="https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/OperationFreedomPaws">https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/OperationFreedomPaws</a></p>	
<p><b>MAIL-IN DONATIONS - CHECKS BY MAIL</b> Send a check to Operation Freedom Paws at our mailing address:</p>	<p>777 First Street PMB 515 Gilroy, CA 95020</p> 
<p><b>DONATE YOUR CAR</b> - Donate your car to Able Auto Charity Donation Corp. They will take your car IN ANY CONDITION! Every donation contributes in some small or big way, and it all adds up to make a difference. Call 408-963-9588, scan the QR code or check out their website: <a href="https://www.ableautocd.com">https://www.ableautocd.com</a></p>	
<p><b>MAKE A LEGACY DONATION</b> - Making a legacy or memorial donation to OFP makes a lasting difference in the lives of disabled clients and their families. Contact Mary Cortani directly to discuss making these donations to OFP. Phone: 408-683-9010</p>	
<p><b>USE THE CHEWY GIVES BACK WISH LIST</b> - Purchase items to donate to OFP via our Chewy Gives Back Wish List, and they're delivered directly to us. Scan the QR code or check out their website: <a href="http://www.chewy.com/g/operation-freedom-paws_b75331095">www.chewy.com/g/operation-freedom-paws_b75331095</a></p>	
<p><b>MAKE A STOCK DONATION</b> - To donate stock to OFP, you'll fill out a stock transfer form from your brokerage, which is the financial institution that manages your stock assets. In the form, you'll list information about the stock you want to donate and which charity you want to donate to. Call for more info (408) 683-9010</p>	
<p><b>USE THE AMAZON WISH LIST</b> - Purchase items to donate to OFP via our Amazon Wish List, the items are delivered directly to us. Scan the QR code or check out their website: <a href="http://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wishlist/1SDVEUAF75ZYM?pldnSite=1">www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wishlist/1SDVEUAF75ZYM?pldnSite=1</a></p>	
<p><b>MAKE A LIFE INSURANCE DONATION</b> - OFP can be named as the beneficiary of a life insurance policy, which is revocable by the donor. OFP can be named as the owner and beneficiary of a new life insurance policy, which is irrevocable. Also, an existing life insurance policy can be changed to include OFP as a beneficiary or to transfer ownership of the policy to our nonprofit.</p>	
<p><b>WE WELCOME CORPORATE GIVING</b> - OFP encourages community corporation partnerships in giving. Whether a corporation wants to make a matching donation to an OFP donation goal or if the corporation provides employee donation match programs. For info call and ask for marketing: (408) 683-9010</p>	
<p><b>CONSIDER A RECURRING GIFT</b> - When you commit to a consistent recurring donation schedule, this is considered a recurring gift. One benefit of recurring gifts is that they help give our nonprofit an expectation of consistent, predictable cash flow and enables us to make forecasts into funding and scheduled payments. It also allows you to spread your contributions out over time. To set up a recurring gift, Scan the QR code or go to our donation website: <a href="https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/OperationFreedomPaws">https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/OperationFreedomPaws</a></p>	
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