

OPERATION **FREEDOM** PAWS



OPERATION FREEDOM PAWS IN 2023



HAPPY HOLIDAYS, FROM OUR FOUNDER, MARY CORTANI

As we approach the holidays and the end of 2023, please know you, our donors, supporters, volunteers, followers, staff and clients, are so appreciated each and every day. I am reflecting on all that Operation Freedom Paws has accomplished this year. 2023 has had its ups and downs; we have all faced challenges, and survived. This fourth quarter newsletter is about believing there is a better tomorrow than today. Believing in the good, caring for one another, being kind, smiling at someone as you pass them. Saying hello, even when you may not feel like it. You never know how it can brighten someone's day or change it, including yours.

We have seen significant progress with our clients. You, our supporters, don't always get to see that progress, but you play an important role in it. For our clients, progress is in things that you and I take for granted every day: stepping outside of their homes and having a conversation with a stranger, a family outing going to Disneyland, a wife reconnecting with her husband over dinner at a restaurant. starting a job, going to school, walking across the stage for graduation. Trying something new. These small moments happen daily for most of us, but for our clients they are huge milestones that we cheer and congratulate them for----moments we have the honor of witnessing every day. Every minute volunteered, every tax-deductible dollar donated to Operation Freedom Paws makes a difference in our clients' lives, and helps give them moments to be celebrated and cherished.

So yes, I count my blessings every day. I am grateful for all of you, for our supporters, our donors, our community partners, the folks that attend our events, the folks that ask us to do presentations. I am grateful for our clients and their families for trusting OFP. The community we live in. My incredible staff that keep things going and moving forward every day.

May we all count our blessings. So, during this holiday season as the year ends may you have warmth, happiness, joy and love. May you find peace knowing that there truly is hope for tomorrow. Thank you. May your lives be blessed each and every day. Thank you for being a part of our community. And please consider Operation Freedom Paws for your year-end donations and monthly donations in the new year. Every penny matters. In doing so you will help us save two lives at a time. "Four Paws Two Feet One Team"®. May 2024 see your dreams fulfilled, may it be all you hope for and more, may it be filled with blessings and miracles.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

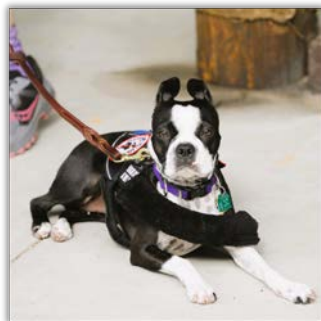
Mary Cortani, Founder and Executive Director of Operation Freedom Paws

OFP Client & First Responder Bridgett & Her Service Dog Piper

“Piper is a Lifesaver”

I've been through a lot of different medical treatments and therapies in my life that didn't work, and I was running out of options. I knew if I didn't find something that worked for me, I was going to spiral down into a deep hole of depression. Growing up, I was taught to keep my pain and anxiety bottled up, think positive, don't dwell, it will get better. As an adult, I spent 20 years dedicated to law enforcement, where again, I had to compartmentalize. I was trained not to express my feelings, push things down, so I could be there for the public. I was also a female officer in a male-dominated field which presented its own challenges. I had to prove each and every day I was just as good as they were at the job, if not better. When traumatic incidents happened in the line of duty, the department didn't believe in doing debriefings, so there wasn't help there to process it.

My first injury on the job happened in 2006. I went through two years of surgeries and treatments, which would be followed by more physical and psychological injuries over my 20-year career – and more anxiety and depression that would continue to surface. Then I suffered a permanent injury to both my wrists and knew I couldn't continue on in law enforcement. I transitioned into the Parks Department working as a teacher in environmental education. But it was still tough to get to work and perform the required physical aspects of the program. I had to make a lifesaving decision to retire in 2019.



When COVID happened in 2020, I had just lost my dog. Thankfully, my husband was at home with me during this time, so I had my “human service person”. But when he went back to work, I became very depressed, anxious, and afraid to leave my house. That's when I came to the realization that life was becoming next to impossible to deal with – facing the injuries and multiple illnesses I had developed over the years. Dogs and horses had been my saviors growing up. Three times during my life I had thought about suicide, but my dogs and horses kept me moving forward. I had to be there to care for them and I didn't want to leave them. I knew I needed another dog and thought having one with me 24/7 might make me feel more secure.

I first heard about OFP from a therapist who had previously recommended patients in the program. I decided to get a puppy and applied to the program knowing I wanted Piper to be a service dog. We were accepted by OFP and our journey began together. OFP was different than any other medical treatments and therapies I had tried before because I had Piper. And I had people who understood what I was going through, anxiety, depression, pain. They understood because they had been through it themselves.

Training was difficult at first, learning to accept my disabilities, anxiety, and depression, and working on being a better person. I had to learn a whole new way of training, not a pet but a service dog, who would be there for me medically. The bond with my service dog is stronger than the bond I had with dogs that were pets. Piper is a lifesaver. She is there for me when I'm down and hurting. She helps me realize if I'm doing too much so I can manage my pain and alerts me when my migraines are coming on so I can take my medication. She knows what I'm feeling before I know what I'm feeling. She knows me better than I do. Going through the program has taught me not only how to train my service dog but it has taught me about myself. I have learned to accept myself and where I am, right now, rather than looking back at where I was, and I'm okay with it. I realize I am important, and being in the here and now, is very important - even if I can't do what I did in the past. I still have things to offer, and I can still make a difference. I am also open to working on things that I buried for years and realize there are other people out there dealing with what I am dealing with too. I look at my future and what it can bring in a more positive way. Things aren't 100% fixed, but there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and I can still live life and enjoy it.

George Kittle Selects OFP as, “My Cause, My Cleats”

Helping Transform Lives Off the Field

Every year, “NFL players reveal their passions beyond the game and wear their hearts on their feet through ‘My Cause, My Cleats’. Players have the opportunity to pick a cause that is important to them and represent their chosen organization on custom designed cleats.” (NFL)

Operation Freedom Paws was speechless and filled with gratitude when San Francisco 49ers Tight End and four-time Pro Bowler, George Kittle, chose our mission! These amazing cleats were designed by Stomping Grounds and feature the OFP logo and tag line, “Four Paws, Two Feet, One Team.”® On December 3rd, George stepped onto the field in Philadelphia wearing OFP cleats and all our clients, staff, and supporters were filled with such pride and appreciation for the incredible visibility and support he was giving the mission. It was a game none of us will ever forget as our hometown 49ers beat the Eagles 42-19! We like to think OFP was a good luck charm but they also played an incredible game. It’s definitely been a dream come true to have the support of George, the Kittle family, and the 49ers, a relationship that started and grew when the 49ers hosted a “Salute to Service” event for our veterans and their family members in November 2022.



Mary said it best when she presented George with his “Salute to Service” nomination in November, “Your support for Operation Freedom Paws, its veterans, and recognizing that service dogs have such a profound impact - we can never thank you enough.” George shared his excitement for supporting OFP’s mission on his family’s Hidden Pearls Podcast saying, “It’s an awesome organization. I love and respect the military and I love dogs.”

The Kittle Family and 49ers have continued to honor our mission by inviting our team to attend events like the Women of the Niners, having clients enjoy games and meeting George Kittle, making donations to support vital resources, and planning an exciting trip to India to benefit OFP!

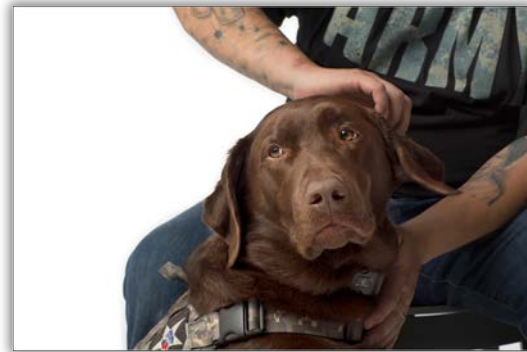
And coming soon, George Kittle’s OFP cleats could be yours! We will be auctioning off George’s signed “My Cause, My Cleats” with all the proceeds going to benefit our mission. Look for the details coming in January through Constant Contact and our social media platforms. Thank you to George, the Kittle Family, and the 49ers for truly helping to transform lives at both ends of the leash.

The Winner of the Purina “Visible Impact Award” is ... Huey!! Congratulations to Army Veteran Ramon and His Service Dog Huey



“Over 3 million military veterans currently struggle with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). While PTSD service dogs are proven to reduce the severity of PTSD symptoms and suicidal behaviors, the demand for these lifesaving dogs greatly outpaces the supply. Dog Chow is on a mission to change that.” This is the mission Purina Dog Chow shared when they launched their “Visible Impact Award” contest on September 1st.

In our Q3 newsletter, we shared that veterans with PTSD across the country were invited to submit their stories and bravely speak to the profound role their service dogs have played in their journeys home and the often-difficult transition to civilian life. Our client Ramon shared how he was taught to train his service dog, a chocolate lab named Huey, in our 48- week program and gained the skillset to help him manage debilitating migraines, night terrors, and open up to his family about his struggles. “Huey has saved my life in so many ways over the past six years,” said Ramon. On September 1st, Purina Dog Chow announced that Huey had been selected as 1 of 5 finalists, with the winner to be decided by a nationwide vote.



On November 9th, in honor of Veterans Day, award-winning recording artist and actor, Anthony Ramos, announced that Huey was the winner! “All of our service dog finalists have made a significant impact for their veterans, but Huey’s story rose to the top for the thousands who voted,” Ramos stated. Ramon and OFP were humbled to be selected among the veterans and their service dog organizations who submitted their stories. Ramon will receive \$10K and Purina Dog Chow will donate \$25K to Operation Freedom Paws. This donation will enable another veteran and dog pulled from a shelter or rescue to develop a lifesaving bond in OFP’s program, which also supports their family members.

Our team was over the moon for Ramon, as well as our mission. Founder and executive director, Mary Cortani shared, “Thanks to everyone who voted for Huey and Ramon. We are incredibly proud of them, not only for the win, but for all they have accomplished in the past six years”. She went on to thank Purina, “for raising awareness of how much trained service dogs can help veterans cope with the psychological and physical impacts of PTSD.” Ramon now gives back helping other veterans and their families navigate their own healing journeys as an OFP mentor-trainer, coming full circle with a new mission and purpose.

OFP 2024 Upcoming Scheduled Events

When You Participate, You Make a Difference!

We love our community and the chance to continue to build relationships with all of you. It's important to us that OFP creates meaningful and engaging events where you feel our appreciation while enabling us to raise funds to save lives at both ends of the leash and heal families. We're excited to announce our 2024 OFP events calendar! We truly hope to see you at our events and thank you for being our partners in healing.



Your Attendance Empowers our Mission!

February 10, 2024

OFP Crab Feed
Old City Hall Restaurant
Gilroy, CA

March 30, 2024

OFP Community
Easter Egg Hunt
OFP Canine Education Center
San Martin, CA

April 13, 2024

OFP Pasta Feed
Old City Hall Restaurant
Gilroy, CA

May 10, 2024

13th Annual OFP Golf Tournament
Coyote Creek Golf Club
Morgan Hill, CA



August 3, 2024

The OFP 13th Annual
"Paws with Patriots" Wine Gala
OFP Canine Education Center
San Martin, CA

Fall 2024 (Date TBD)

The OFP 6th Annual
Bowling Event
Location TBD

November 10, 2024

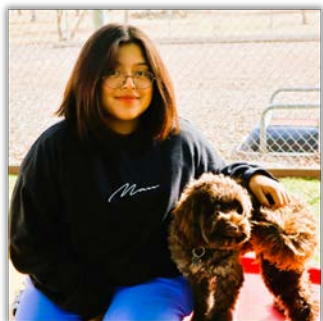
Morgan Hill Veterans Day Run
Benefiting Local
Veteran Organizations
Morgan Hill, CA

OFP Daycare and Boarding – Pawsome Greetings!

An Update From Our Team

Thank you to all our amazing two and four-legged customers! We are so grateful for all the furry friends, old and new, who played, stayed, and trained with us in 2023. We are proud of our wonderful kennel tech team for the care they show each and every dog that comes through our door, and the way they make them feel at home. We're grateful to our customers for voting us the "Best Doggie Daycare" in Morgan Hill. Your community and trust mean so much to us. Your business helps to sustain our nonprofit mission throughout the year, empowering us to help veterans, first responders, children and others with disabilities.

It's truly a wonderful relationship between our kennel tech team and our customers. Our kennel techs are here day in, day out, rain or shine, with such love and commitment for their work and the dogs in their care. This year, rain meant major storms that hit OFP and caused property damage. But our team acted quickly, calmly, and professionally to keep all the dogs safe. They also excel at multi-tasking, making sure our guests have clean accommodations, get their meals and medications on time, enjoy walks and socializing in the play yard, train, and update their pawrents! Oh and did we mention their awesome photographers? And we feel the appreciation from our customers. They often surprise us with bagels, pizza, doughnuts and other fun treats.



In this season of giving, we hope you all know what a gift you are to us. As you get together with friends and family to celebrate the holidays and The New Year, we hope you'll keep a few tips in mind to keep the season bright for you and your dogs. We suggest creating a safe space away from all the merriment where your dog can go if they start to feel overwhelmed. Be sure to introduce friends and family to your dog slowly, even if they've met before. Advise guests to turn sideways without bowing and extend their hand down for your dog to sniff it. Watch your dog's body language carefully; if they are good to interact, let your guests know they can rub under your dog's chin. If their body language is tense or fearful, don't force the interaction. You may also have some overnight guests, particularly family, who ask if they can bring their own dogs to your house. It's important to remember here that your home is your dog's territory and you and your family are their pack. So you'll want to know in advance that these dogs get along or have an established relationship. With all the hustle and bustle, the holidays are not a good time to make a new introduction.

We wish you and your family a wonderful holiday season and a Happy New Year! We hope you enjoy these fun photos of our team and furry friends. You can follow us on Facebook - www.facebook.com/OFPKennel and Instagram - www.instagram.com/ofpdaycareandboarding to get a daily dose of our adorable guests and training tips - and please share our socials with your friends and family. The more, the merrier!!

End-of-Year Giving

Give The Gift That Changes Lives Year Round

Tis' the season when we come together with our family and friends to celebrate the holidays. For many of the veterans and first responders we work with, they have sacrificed years, even decades of holidays without their loved ones, to serve their nation and communities. Many of those individuals now bear the physical and psychological wounds of that service, for their families, the secondary trauma. The holidays can often be triggering and difficult, but we can give them the resources and support to make them brighter, with your help!



Nonprofits, including Operation Freedom Paws, are in the midst of year-end giving campaigns. Rising costs across the board have impacted us all, and this has been a financially difficult year for small nonprofits like OFP. In 2024, the cost of our program will rise from \$22K to \$25K. There are 130 individuals on our waiting list, and since we don't charge our clients and their families in the program, the continued support of civic leaders, business organizations, foundations, and our communities is truly critical. We are incredibly grateful for the new and re-occurring donors who have already given to us this year. Thank you! And we understand and appreciate those donors who have given in the past and could not give this year because of their own economic challenges. But if you are fortunate enough to be in a position to give and want to make a tax-deductible donation, here are our mission objectives to see if they align with your own.

If your mission is suicide prevention.

If you're passionate about rescuing dogs and animal welfare.

If you support military veterans and first-responders with PTSD.

If you care about assisting physically and/or psychologically disabled adults and children.

If restoring mental health is important to you.

If helping struggling families reconnect is meaningful to you.

If you want to help people regain independence and return to the workforce.

If any of these causes are near and dear to your heart, please consider a donation to Operation Freedom Paws.

OFP has a platinum rating for transparency on Candid (candid.org), a website where nonprofits can enter information about their structure, programs, and finances. While Candid does not actually rate charities, the information there, which includes tax returns, can help you make informed decisions. We hope after you finish your research that you choose to invest in the lifesaving teams of Operation Freedom Paws and share our mission with your friends! You can either make a donation on our highly secure end-of-year giving platform here <https://ofpendofyear23.givesmart.com> or check out the back of this newsletter for all the other ways you can make a difference this holiday season.

There are so Many Ways to Help

SOCIAL MEDIA

1. LIKE AND FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM AND LINKEDIN

Share our posts with your friends! facebook.com/OperationFreedomPaws
instagram.com/opfreedompaws • linkedin.com/company/operation-freedom-paws



SHOPPING

1. **USE THE CHEWY GIVES BACK WISH LIST** - 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: www.chewy.com/g/operation-freedom-paws_b75331095



2. **USE THE AMAZON WISH LIST** - 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: www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wishlist/1SDVEUAF75ZYM?pldnSite=1



DONATE

1. **DONATE DIRECTLY** - Make a donation directly on the Network for Good website that comes straight to OFP. To donate Scan the QR code or check out the website: <https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/OperationFreedomPaws>



2. **CONSIDER A RECURRING GIFT** - When you commit to a recurring donation, this is considered a recurring gift. Recurring gifts help give nonprofits an expectation of predictable cash flow. To set up a recurring gift, scan the QR code or go to our donation website: <https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/OperationFreedomPaws>



3. **MAIL-IN DONATIONS - CHECKS BY MAIL**
Send a check to Operation Freedom Paws
at our mailing address:

777 First Street
PMB 515
Gilroy, CA 95020



4. **DONATE YOUR CAR** - Donate your car to Able Auto Charity Donation Corp. They will take your car IN ANY CONDITION! Call (408) 963-9588, scan the QR code or check out their website: <https://www.ableautocd.com>



ESTATE / FINANCIAL PLANNING

1. **MAKE A LEGACY DONATION** - Making a legacy or memorial donation to OFP makes a lasting difference in the lives of our clients and their families. Contact Mary Cortani directly to discuss making these donations to OFP. Phone: (408) 683-9010



2. **MAKE A LIFE INSURANCE DONATION** - OFP can be named as the beneficiary of an existing life insurance policy or as the owner and beneficiary of a new life insurance policy. Contact your policy holder for more information.



3. **MAKE A STOCK DONATION** - To donate stock to OFP, fill out a stock transfer form from your brokerage. In the form, you'll list information about the stock you want to donate and which charity you want to donate to. Call OFP for more info (408) 683-9010



CORPORATE

1. **WE WELCOME CORPORATE GIVING** - OFP encourages community corporation partnerships in giving. By making 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



Thank You!