

LIFE notes

LIFE prides itself on helping those in need and for being the champion for those who cannot speak but who enrich our lives and everyday make us a little more... human.

Issue 54 December 26, 2018

True Service Edition



Upcoming events

Dear Friends,

I cried when President George H.W. Bush died on November 30, 2018. Yes, we lost a great man and a true leader who had an amazing spirit of service, decency, and humanity. But for me, there was also a personal side. Twenty years ago, I was privileged to receive the Daily Points of Light Award from him. It is as humbling now as it was then to know that he felt that my humanitarian service deserved recognition, when it was he who served and inspired as a guiding light for our country and the world.

I cried again when I saw the video and photos of Sully, his service dog, lie beside his casket in the Capitol Rotunda. While Sully was only at the President's side since former First Lady Barbara Bush passed away earlier this year, by all accounts he was a faithful and wonderful companion, the embodiment of all that a service dog does and represents.

For me, this was also personal. To be sure, the tears that flowed from my eyes as I watched Sully pay his last respects to Mr. Bush were tears of both joy and sadness. Given that I have spent the past quarter-century working to raise awareness and ensure that proper tribute be paid to America's 4.2 million living disabled veterans and those who died, I was filled with joy to learn that the beautiful two-year-old yellow Labrador will join the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. There he will assist with "physical and occupational therapy to wounded soldiers and active duty personnel during their journey to recovery," according to the America's VetDogs Association, the organization that trained him as a service dog.

Friday, January 4, 2019

**LIFE's 25th Silver Jubilee
Lady in Red Gala
The Breakers, Palm Beach
6:00 PM**

To learn more or to donate, visit
www.life-edu.org or call 561.582.8083.

(Dear Friends continued)

But I was also sad seeing Sully complete his “mission” with President Bush. The reason is two-fold. Numerous studies have found an alarming high rate of veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury. Among the men and women who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, at least 20% of those who sought treatment have been diagnosed with PTSD and/or depression; for those who did not seek treatment, that number increases dramatically to a whopping 50%. And one in every three Vietnam veterans is reported to be afflicted with the problem.

There is, therefore, an enormous need for more dogs to receive the special training that Sully did and then be “deployed” to provide service, therapy and companionship for those courageous men and women who proudly donned the uniforms of America’s military branches but who continue to bear the scars of war. Long after the fighting on the battlefield ends, they continue to battle both invisible and visible wounds.

Let us never forget that this battle far too often leads to horrific results. Every day, 20 veterans take their own lives.

We have a collective national obligation to rectify this disturbing and inconceivable situation by ensuring that all disabled veterans, and especially those with PTSD, TBI and related ailments, have access and receive the highest quality of care, including a service or therapy canine if they want one.

Therein lies the second reason for my sadness. While statistics vary slightly from study to study, it is estimated that animal shelters in the U.S. take in some four to five million dogs each year, of which upwards of one million are euthanized. This is unconscionable and an absolute travesty! As an adopter of about two dozen dogs, as a benefactor of American Humane, the nation’s foremost organization committed to the welfare and well-being of animals, and as a human being, I am repulsed by the fact that we are willingly putting healthy dogs to death.

These dogs can serve a perfect - indeed, essential - purpose to our country. The answer is as simple as the ABCs and staring us all right in the face. Let’s fulfill our responsibility to disabled veterans by taking the dogs out of shelters, providing them with special training, and then give them free of charge to those veterans.

There are significant obstacles to achieving goal. Already, waiting lists for the dogs are incredibly long, 18-24 months, and the training process is time-consuming and expensive; as much as \$30,000 per dog over a six month to two year training period. That is why I am now calling on Congress to pass the Pups for Patriot Act. The bipartisan legislation, introduced by U.S. Representatives Gus Bilirakis and Henry Cuellar, directs the Veterans Administration to dedicate resources that would greatly increase the availability and accessibility of more highly-trained lifesaving service dogs to veterans struggling to cope with PTSD and TBI.

The return on the government’s investment would go way beyond the net bottom line. Simply put, this legislation would be life-changing. While still in the nascent stage, there is already some exciting research that shows that veterans who have been given these amazing canines are having a better time readjusting to civilian life. They tend to sleep better and have less anxiety. They report less depression and negative emotions. And their ability to interact with family, friends, and others has increased.

And the VA wouldn’t be starting from scratch. It can marshal the experience and expertise of existing initiatives such as the Paws4Patriots program under the auspices of the Lois Pope LIFE Center for Military Affairs at American Humane; the aforementioned America’s VetDogs Association; Pets for Vets, and K9s for Warriors, among others. All are rescuing dogs from shelters and abuse situations. Professionally- certified instructors are working with the dogs, teaching them obedience and special skills such as waking and calming PTSD-afflicted veterans from nightmares, distracting the veterans from experiencing anxiety in unfamiliar settings, watching the veteran’s back so that uninvited people don’t get too close, and walking correctly with veterans in wheelchairs or with other disabilities.

Remarkably, these organizations are essentially doing it all for free thanks to donations from caring and compassionate individuals and grants from foundations. I am proud and privileged to be one of these people. But philanthropy only goes so far.

Engraved on the VA building in Washington DC are these words from President Abraham Lincoln: “to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan.” Passage of Pups for Patriot Act would be a magnificent reaffirmation of this commitment.

Love,

Lois

To learn more or to donate, visit
www.life-edu.org or call 561.582.8083.