



Tony La Russa's
**Animal
Rescue
Foundation**

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Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation Applauds Signing of PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act

New Law, Which Includes Rescue's Pets and Vets Program Input, Helps Veterans with PTSD

WALNUT CREEK, California (August 31, 2021) – Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation (ARF) is celebrating President Biden's signing of the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) for Veterans Therapy Act on August 25, 2021, which directs the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to create a five-year pilot program pairing veterans with service-related mental health challenges with canines training to be psychiatric service dogs. In a significant shift from similar, previously proposed legislation, this bill promotes veterans' participation in the training of their service dogs. Based on the success of ARF's similar Pets and Vets training model, recently retired Congressman Steve Stivers (R-OH) who first authored the legislation sought ARF's expertise while drafting the legislation.

"This is an incredible accomplishment after many years of witnessing the significant therapeutic benefits of veterans with PTSD working with psychiatric service dogs," says ARF Executive Director Elena Bicker. "It's a huge step to have the VA now recognize this as well, and we're glad our experiences and achievements could assist in crafting legislation that could potentially help thousands of veterans and dogs across the country."

ARF's Pets and Vets program identifies dogs in animal shelters who might have the necessary qualities to change a veteran's life. After careful assessment, the dogs are matched with veterans diagnosed with challenges such as PTSD, anxiety, agoraphobia, and traumatic brain injuries (TBI). The pairs train together for approximately a year to graduate as service dog teams. "The additional benefits to a veteran in this type of dual training include emotional support, a deeper bond with the dog, and a greater sense of purpose, confidence and accomplishment," explains Bicker.

"Our veterans fought for our freedom, and I've heard from many veterans who say that's exactly what their service dog gives them – freedom. They're free to go to restaurants, to fly on planes, to go to the movies, things that post-traumatic stress had made impossible," Stivers said.

ARF's Pets and Vets program is planning to promote similar programs nationally through partnerships with animal shelters, veterans' organizations and other non-profits around the nation. The program's national headquarters in Walnut Creek, CA was recently completed and will be used for the training of local veteran-service dog teams, as well as those looking to duplicate the program for veterans and dogs in their communities.

"We say our program is Saving Both Ends of the Leash® because we see significant transformations between these veterans and dogs," said Bicker. "Passage of this legislation moves our country closer to providing those who have sacrificed so much the richer, fuller lives they deserve."

About Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation (ARF) | www.arflife.org

At the core of ARF's mission is the rescue of dogs and cats who have run out of time at public or overcrowded shelters, giving them a chance at life. Since 1991, ARF has matched 45,000 pets with loving homes. Launched in 2011, ARF's innovative Pets and Vets program is Saving Both Ends of the Leash® and helps fulfill ARF's mission of People Rescuing Animals ... Animals Rescuing People®.

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