



## **VMF Launches Puppy Raiser Recruitment Campaign - Seeking Puppy Raisers!**

VMF launched its 2017 puppy raiser recruitment campaign on June 1 and is proud to introduce our new and improved website at [www.vetsfwd.org](http://www.vetsfwd.org)!

Puppy raisers are a key component of VMF's mission, and we are actively seeking local dog lovers to raise and train puppies for our program. The commitment is typically 20 to 24 months, and all equipment and veterinary care is provided by VMF. Volunteers provide a good home environment and food for the dogs, and they participate in the dogs' weekly and bi-monthly training.



Volunteers who commit to the program receive a puppy at eight weeks old and work with VMF trainers three to four times per month, at VMF's Training Center in Dulles, Virginia, along with reinforcing behaviors at home. In addition to socialization and good behavior, the puppy is taught basic obedience and specialized skills, such as helping with laundry, fetching a water bottle from the fridge, and fetching medication. At 16 to 17 months of age, the puppy, which is at this point, *a service dog in training*, is ready to be matched with a veteran and begin advanced training tailored to meet the veteran's specific needs.

"Meeting the veteran who received the service dog we raised gave my son and

me a clearer perspective on what VMF is all about.

He tearfully thanked us, letting us know how much this meant to him and his family. I couldn't have been prouder," said former puppy raiser Dana.

Optimal candidates to raise a puppy as a service dog are dog-loving women and men with no young children, who have had a dog as an adult, have had some experience training a dog, are in good physical condition, and live within 30 miles of VMF's Training Center in Dulles.



Both photos show VMF Puppy Raisers and SDiTs at Honor Flights at Dulles Airport

If you are interested in helping a puppy serve a higher purpose, visit our [website](#) and [our puppy raiser page](#) or [email Michele Khol](#), VMF's Director of Canine Operations.

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## **Service Dog Updates: SD Finn and SD King, with Veterans Bob and Jessie**

**SD Finn recently accompanied Veteran Bob and his family from Rhode Island to Disney World, something Bob says he never would have been able to do without Finn:**

*"Airports are busy congested spaces and can be lethal to veterans with PTSD. Prior to having Finn, just the thought of entering one was enough to stop me. Finn kept me calm and focused on our journey ... We navigated the airport and baggage intake without incident, and I was even able to enjoy my grandchildren's excitement. We flew with SouthWest and were easily able to board first after checking in with the boarding staff at the gate. Finn quickly settled down and we had an enjoyable flight. Upon landing, Finn and I easily and confidently navigated the airport including*



monorails and elevators.

## **Bob and SD Finn**

*At Disney, Finn was my true hero. He was calm, and he confidently helped me through security and crowds. Finn had no issues with the huge crowds, noise, or navigating me through shops. He stayed focused and frequently checked in to check on me. We went to shows with moving floors and lots of sudden noises without so much as a flicker of dismay. We went on several rides ... We sat at the Bippity Bop Boutique for over an hour while my granddaughter was transformed into Princess Ana.*

*Our trip home was as smooth as our trip there.*

*Again I want to thank Veterans Moving Forward for Finn. At my side and as my constant companion, he gave me the confidence to undertake such an anxiety-filled trip that I so desperately wanted to share with my family, and especially my grandchildren. The memories we made together as a family are beyond priceless to me and my family. Finn not only allowed me to take our family trip to Disney World but he has given me a quality of life every day that I very honestly never thought I would have."*

**During the same month, SD King accompanied Veteran Jessie and his wife as they traveled from Maryland to Florida to visit their family:**

*"This was our first trip flying with King, and his performance was impeccable; he was not bothered at all by the crowds, and surprisingly, I found myself as calm as I can be around so many people especially at the [airport] security checkpoint. I credit King in no small part for that as he, by his gentle nature, was a calming influence on me. He paid me constant attention as he is taught to do ... Once on the plane, King settled in under my seat and barely moved on the long flights both on the way and the return ... Even in the restrooms in the airports and on the planes, he stood in the stalls and waited for me ..."*



**SD King on plane with Jessie**

SD King went on to accompany Jessie and his wife to visit Jessie's mom in central Florida, to visit Jessie's brother (with small children) in Tampa, with stays in hotels and at the beach in Clearwater. Jessie says of King, "He didn't pay it any mind and walked with me as far as I was able, even to restaurants with myself, my wife and Mom ... All told, he was a complete professional and gentleman. His striking appearance of course drew attention from anyone who saw him, but he never forgot himself or his job even nudging my hands when I was becoming nervous, anxious, or in pain to let me know what to do next, and of course, when it was his mealtime."

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## "It takes a village:" VMF Volunteer Shelly Habel and Sugarboy's Luxury Fiber Creations

Training service dogs isn't all work ... the dogs play too, and they need special toys suited to their needs - as well as other fun training items that help them learn new skills. VMF is extremely grateful to Shelly Habel, whose business, Sugarboy's Luxury Fiber Creations, donates custom-made toys, balls, pulls, and anything else a service dog in training may need as part of his training.



SD Prince with pull

Shelly grew up with animals, having had a cat since age three. Growing up, she loved drawing, painting, and photography and learned to knit at 18 - and then went on to felting and sewing. She started her business after being inspired by her cats' love of all things alpaca and wool.

Combining her love of crafting with making things for her fur babies led to Sugarboy's first product, the Paca Pet Pouf, an innovative way to use the seconds and thirds left after an alpaca is sheared. Cat and dog toys soon followed.



SDi Mickey with his Alpaca Ball Toy

*"My first cat was a seal point Siamese, so when I became an adult, my first purebred cat was a lilac point Balinese, Sugarboy ... He was a special cat and had only one kidney. With love and supportive care, he lived until 10, when all of the TLC was no longer enough. He lives on in our memories but his legacy is alive in our business."*

*"When I started the business, it was important to me to find an organization to support. I found VMF through Stephanie Frederick at VCA Alexandria Animal Hospital. I was smitten after observing the first training session with Michele and Suzanne. I worked with Michele to develop a welcome bag for each new puppy. Michele then identified what support items each dog would need to assist its veteran during the final stages of training. I've made special key chains, door pulls and drawer pulls for each dog, as specified by Michele. I remain in awe of what these service dogs do for those who have served and sacrificed for our country."*

In addition to her work with Sugarboy's, Shelly is the Associate Director of

Student-Athlete Services at Georgetown University, supporting 700 Division I student-athletes. Please check out [Sugarboy's website](#) for a glimpse of the amazing products Shelly provides.

**Thank you Shelly and Sugarboy's for your commitment to VMF!**

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Sign up for our monthly emails.

Veterans Moving Forward (VMF) is a veteran-centric non-profit and 501(c)(3) charity dedicated to providing trained service dogs and canine therapy services to veterans with physical and mental health challenges across the full spectrum of needs. Your tax-deductible donation to VMF will help us with this mission.

**VETERANS<sup>®</sup>**  
MOVING FORWARD

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VMF is proud to have earned the GuideStar Exchange Gold Logo as a symbol of our commitment to transparency and accountability. We encourage you to visit our [GuideStar profile](#).

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