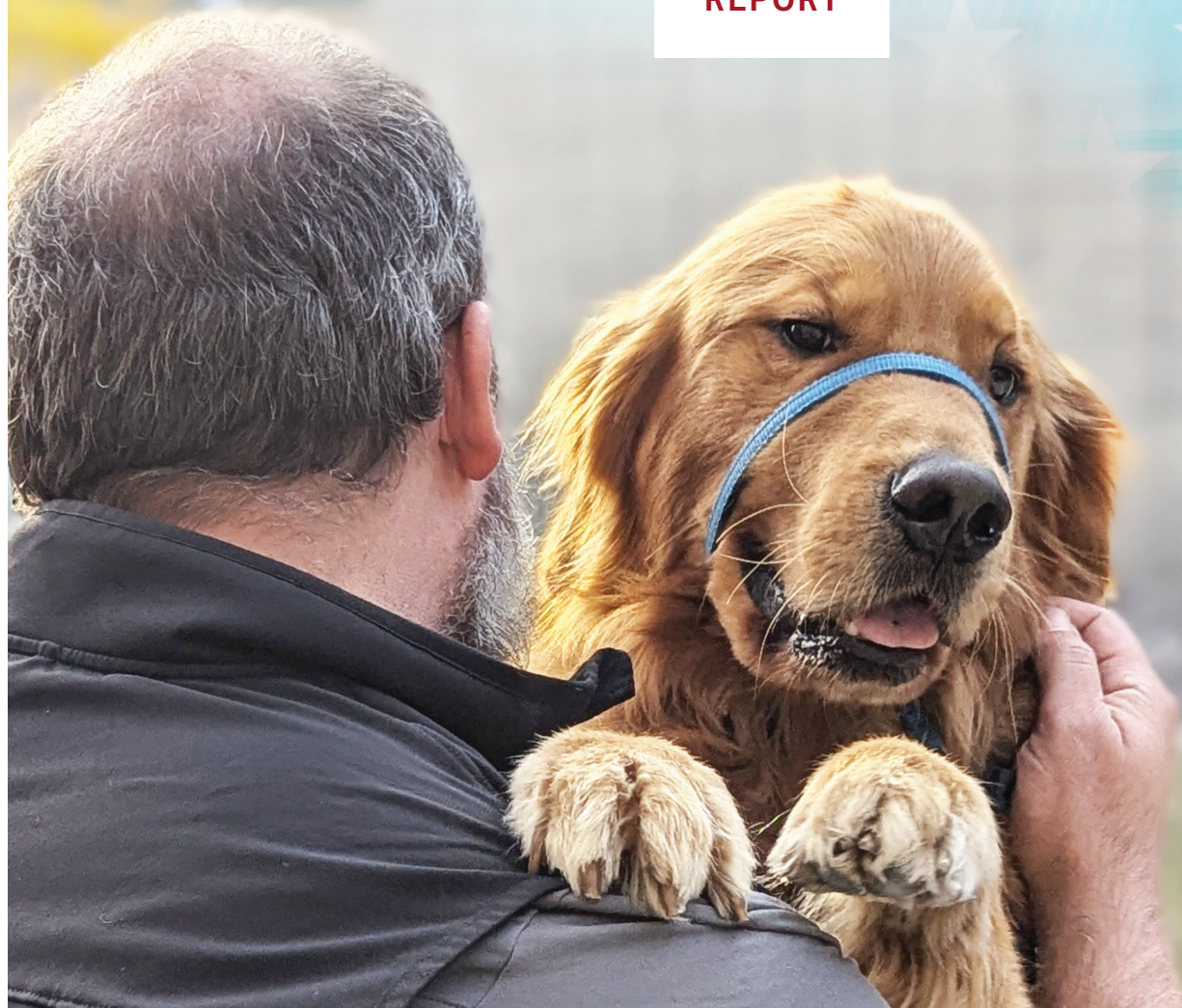


**2024
2025**
**ANNUAL
REPORT**



**CELEBRATING A DECADE OF
SERVICE DOG PLACEMENTS WITH
VETERANS & FIRST RESPONDERS**



HELPING PAWS

ABOUT HELPING PAWS

Our Mission

The mission of Helping Paws is to further people's independence and quality of life through the use of Assistance Dogs. The human/animal bond is the foundation of Helping Paws. We celebrate the mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals, honoring the dignity and well-being of all.

Assistance Dogs International Member

Helping Paws is an accredited member of Assistance Dogs International (ADI). We adhere to their requirements in training our service dogs. ADI works to improve the areas of training, placement and utilization of assistance dogs as well as staff and volunteer education. For more information on ADI, visit their website at www.assistedogsinternational.org.

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Maryanne Mahowald, Vice President
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Lynn Walker, Secretary
Mike Urbanos, Immediate Past President

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Alyssa Gohr
Ashley Groshek
William Huffman
Hope Levy
Margie Lindberg
Megan Rounds

OUR SPECIAL THANKS TO

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Grossman Design Associates

Photography

Chelsey Bosak
Laura Gentry
Jonathan Kramer
Steve McCuskey
Scruff Life Photography

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Sue Kliewer, Director of Training and Client Services
Chelsey Bosak, Director of Volunteer Experience

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Thomas Long	Mary Tiegen
Corinne McCuskey	Monica Vogel
Morgan Murch	Chad Wood



DEVELOPMENT
21%

PROGRAM
72%

MANAGEMENT
7%



If you want to view the complete audited financial statement or donor information, please visit our website, www.helpingpaws.org or call 952-988-9359 Ext. 101

INCOME STATEMENT (FISCAL YEAR ENDED MAY 31, 2025)

	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	TOTAL
REVENUE			
Special events – contributions	\$249,550	\$ –	\$249,550
Special events – other	39,512	–	39,512
Less: direct costs	(97,238)	–	(97,238)
Net special event revenue	191,824	–	191,824
Contributions	1,270,581	173,569	1,444,150
Program services	11,505	–	11,505
Interest income	25,263	15,411	40,674
Net assets released from restrictions	22,552	(22,552)	–
TOTAL REVENUE	1,521,725	166,428	1,688,153
EXPENSES			
Program services	1,214,611	–	1,214,611
Management and general	122,336	–	122,336
Fundraising	350,306	–	350,306
TOTAL EXPENSES	1,687,253	–	1,687,253
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	(165,528)	166,428	900
NET ASSETS, BEGINNING	876,675	545,432	1,422,107
NET ASSETS, ENDING	\$711,147	\$711,860	\$1,423,007

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BALANCE SHEET (MAY 31, 2025)

ASSETS	
CURRENT ASSETS	
Cash and cash equivalents	\$250,805
Certificates of deposit	150,003
Pledges receivable, current portion	141,875
Prepaid expenses	60,216
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	602,899
Furniture and equipment	80,499
Lease improvements	377,606
Software	28,950
TOTAL	487,055
Accumulated depreciation	(81,474)
PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT, net	405,581
OTHER ASSETS	
Pledges receivable, net of current portion	50,000
Endowment fund	514,375
Operating lease right-of-use assets	346,315
TOTAL OTHER ASSETS	910,690
TOTAL ASSETS	1,919,170
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	
CURRENT LIABILITIES	
Accounts payable	48,284
Accrued expenses	85,063
Deferred revenue	2,500
Current portion of operating lease liabilities	61,852
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	197,699
LONG-TERM LIABILITIES	
Operating lease liability, net of current portion	298,464
TOTAL LIABILITIES	496,163
NET ASSETS	
Without donor restrictions:	
Undesignated	448,681
Designated-future maintenance and operations	262,466
Total without donor restrictions	711,147
With donor restrictions	711,860
TOTAL NET ASSETS	1,423,007
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$1,919,170

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

ALISON LIENAU



This year, we marked a powerful milestone: 10 years of placing Helping Paws service dogs with veterans and first responders living with service-related PTSD.

Behind every one of these life-changing partnerships is a deep network of support—volunteers who raise and train our dogs, donors and corporate sponsors who believe in our mission, community partners who support our vision, staff who guide each placement with care, and a community that refuses to let our heroes walk alone.

Helping Paws service dogs provide veterans and first responders more than comfort. They help their partners regain confidence, reduce isolation, and navigate everyday life with strength. Whether it's interrupting nightmares, creating space in crowded environments, or applying calming pressure during distress, these dogs perform critical tasks—and offer steady, unwavering companionship.

This year alone, we created 13 partnerships, placing five dogs with veterans or first responders, six with individuals with physical disabilities, and two in facility partnerships. This human/animal bond is the foundation of Helping Paws. We celebrate the mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals, honoring the dignity and well-being of all. And with 51 assistance dogs currently in training, the ripple effect of the “Power of Dog” and the community impact of Helping Paws partnerships will only grow.

While we celebrate these milestones, we as a community also faced profound loss. We lost two extraordinary members of our Helping Paws family: former Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman and her husband, Mark. Melissa was not only a devoted public servant—she was one of our own, serving as a volunteer Foster Home Trainer. The dog she, her husband Mark, and their daughter Sophie helped raise, Minnie, is now working alongside a veteran. Their family dog Gilbert, who once trained in our program, also lost his life in the tragedy.

Their loss was felt across Minnesota and far beyond. And in the days that followed, our community rose up in support. Your compassion, your words, and your presence reminded us why this work matters. In honor of Melissa, Mark, and Gilbert, we established The Hortman Heroes Fund, that will expand our PTSD program, helping more veterans and first responders receive the support they need—and deserve.

Because the need is great. And the impact is real.

As we look forward to another decade of supporting those who served us, and to supporting our larger Helping Paws community, we remain committed to our mission: *Furthering people's independence and quality of life through the use of Assistance Dogs*. We invite you to join us – whether by volunteering, donating or spreading the word – so together we can continue transforming lives through the power of assistance dogs.

As Board President, I'm proud to stand with an organization that responds with empathy, clarity, and commitment. From expanding litters and growing training capacity, to placing dogs with veterans and first responders across Minnesota and beyond, Helping Paws continues to build hope—one partnership at a time.

To everyone who makes this possible: thank you. “A Night of Heroes,” indeed.

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ALYSSA GOLOB



At Helping Paws, we've always believed in building strong foundations—whether in the early days of puppy development or in the relationships that grow between our volunteers, our staff, and the individuals we serve. This year, we've taken a bold step forward with the launch of *Four Paws Forward*, a new strategic plan focused on innovation, science, and community. It's our roadmap for meeting growing demand while staying true to the values that define us.

The current waitlist to be matched with a Helping Paws dog is a reality that reflects both the growing need for our program and the time, care, and expertise that go into training each dog. While we're proud of our standards, we also know how hard it can be to wait. That reality pushes us to think creatively: How can we place more dogs without compromising the quality of our program or the strength of our partnerships?

The answer lies in evolving thoughtfully, with intention. This year, we introduced a new way to volunteer: Host Homes. We know not everyone can commit to a full two-year training journey. Host Homes offer a more flexible path. Volunteers provide loving care for dogs in training, while our staff takes on the daily work of teaching advanced skills through full-day drop-offs at our new Blue Coat Academy. This model opens the door at Hemak Training Center to more volunteers while allowing our dogs to continue receiving high-quality instruction from our professional trainers.

To make this work, we needed a way to connect it all—and that's where our new transport van came in. Affectionately known as D-UBER, it allows us to bring dogs from Host Homes across the region to Eden Prairie multiple times each week. This simple solution has already made a big impact, ensuring consistency in training while reducing barriers for our volunteers.

At the same time, we're investing in strengthening our dogs from the very beginning. In 2024, we opened the Herman Puppy Enrichment Center, the first of its kind in Minnesota. With support from research partners like Duke University's Canine Cognition Center, we now begin enrichment activities when puppies are just a few days old. By the time they're six weeks, they've already been introduced to car rides, puzzle-solving, and early socialization—all of which help set them up for success later in life.

Our support doesn't stop at graduation. This year we opened a new grooming center and an indoor dog park at our Eden Prairie facility—both designed to help graduates care for and connect with their dogs in accessible, year-round spaces. We're also creating more opportunities for alumni to stay involved through group outings and continued training.

Each of these efforts reflects our commitment to long-term, life-changing partnerships between people and service dogs. They also reflect the trust and support you've shown us over the past 38 years. Together, we're making it possible to place more dogs, serve more people, and build a future where no one has to wait longer than necessary for the independence a Helping Paws dog can bring.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

26

PUPPIES BORN
AND SUPPORTED

175+

HELPING PAWS' 175
VOLUNTEERS ARE VERY
ACTIVE, DONATING
95,000 HOURS. THIS IS
THE EQUIVALENT TO 45
FULL TIME EMPLOYEES
AND A VALUE OF \$2.9
MILLION (\$30.98
HOURLY RATE IS FROM
THE INDEPENDENT
SECTOR).



14

ASSISTANCE
DOGS PLACED

83

ASSISTANCE
DOG TEAMS
SUPPORTED

5

ASSISTANCE
DOGS PLACED
WITH INDIVIDUALS
WITH PHYSICAL
DISABILITIES

100%

OF RESPONDENTS INDICATED
THAT HAVING A SERVICE DOG
HAS HAD A POSITIVE INFLUENCE
ON THEIR LIVES.

6

ASSISTANCE
DOGS PLACED
WITH VETERANS
OR FIRST 5
RESPONDERS
WITH PTSD

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

2K

51 ASSISTANCE DOGS IN
TRAINING CONSUMED MORE
THAN TWO THOUSAND (2000)
POUNDS OF DOG KIBBLE/FOOD.



3

ASSISTANCE DOGS
PLACED THROUGH
FACILITY DOG
PARTNERSHIPS

825

KILOMETERS WERE
WALKED, RAN, OR
ROLLED DURING
OUR ANNUAL
PAWS IN MOTION
5K/1.5K



NUMBER
OF TREATS
CONSUMED:
INFINITY AND
BEYOND!!!!

100%

OF RESPONDENTS
REPORTED FEELING
LESS LONELY SINCE
RECEIVING THEIR
SERVICE DOG.

51

ASSISTANCE
DOGS IN
TRAINING

GARY HOKE & SERVICE DOG PAVO

I was in the Army from 2010 to 2013 as an infantryman with the 101st Airborne Division, serving in Afghanistan. After my tour, I experienced frequent panic attacks, anxiety, and hypervigilance. I had trouble even being out in public. It felt like I was constantly on edge, and everyday situations became really overwhelming.

I heard about Helping Paws from someone at the VA who told me how their service dogs could help with my difficulties. I went through their process and got matched with Pavo. He's been a big help in my life since getting him. It makes it a lot easier for me to be part of society again and to be able to go out in public, live my life, and do more things. Pavo gives me a sense of stability and reassurance, even in crowded or stressful environments. He really helps me calm down and not be so anxious or experience so many panic attacks. He's just made life a lot better for me.

I want to thank all of the trainers and volunteers at Helping Paws. It's a big help for combat vets like me. Thank you guys for what you do.

“HE’S JUST
MADE LIFE
BETTER
FOR ME”



ASHLEY WERNEMAN & FACILITY DOG OPIE

I'm a licensed marriage and family therapist, and this is my co-therapist, Opie. She's a trained facility dog from Helping Paws. She comes to work with me every day, and together we work with teenagers, kids, adults, and couples. Everyone who meets her just instantly falls in love with her. She provides therapy by coming on the couch next to them, letting them pet her head, putting her head on their lap... just being a really warm, welcoming presence. She's really in tune with people's emotions. A heartwarming moment was when a client was crying and she brought them a tissue box.

She's a natural at her job, and I see the difference she makes in people's lives every single day. She's so sweet, and we are so lucky to have her. None of this would have been possible without Helping Paws and all the amazing work that they're doing. She's not just touching my life every day but she's touching every single person that walks through the door. We are so grateful for Helping Paws.

**"SHE'S
REALLY IN
TUNE WITH
PEOPLE'S
EMOTIONS"**



MIKE O'BRIEN & SERVICE DOG NORM

Hi, I'm Mike, and this is Norm—my service dog from Helping Paws. I was born with half a heart and just one working lung. Doctors told my mom I might not make it past my teens—let alone walk very far. Hypoplastic left heart syndrome meant the entire left side of my heart never formed, so two chambers have been doing the work of four my whole life. By age eight, I'd already survived over ten open-heart surgeries. They kept me alive, but daily life still felt like walking a tightrope with no net.

Before Normie came into my life, I struggled to get even 2,000 steps a day. If I dropped my phone, I had to crawl to get it. Stairs felt like mountains, and a quick grocery run could leave me wiped out for the rest of the day. Everything was hard—until this golden retriever in a blue Helping Paws vest showed up and changed everything.

Norm is my service dog, my daily motivation, and my constant companion. With Normie, 5,000 steps became a warm-up. Most days now, we hit over 10,000. Yesterday, we set a new record—18,000 steps. My legs were shaking, my chest was tight, but Norm nudged my hand like he was saying, “keep going.” And I did.

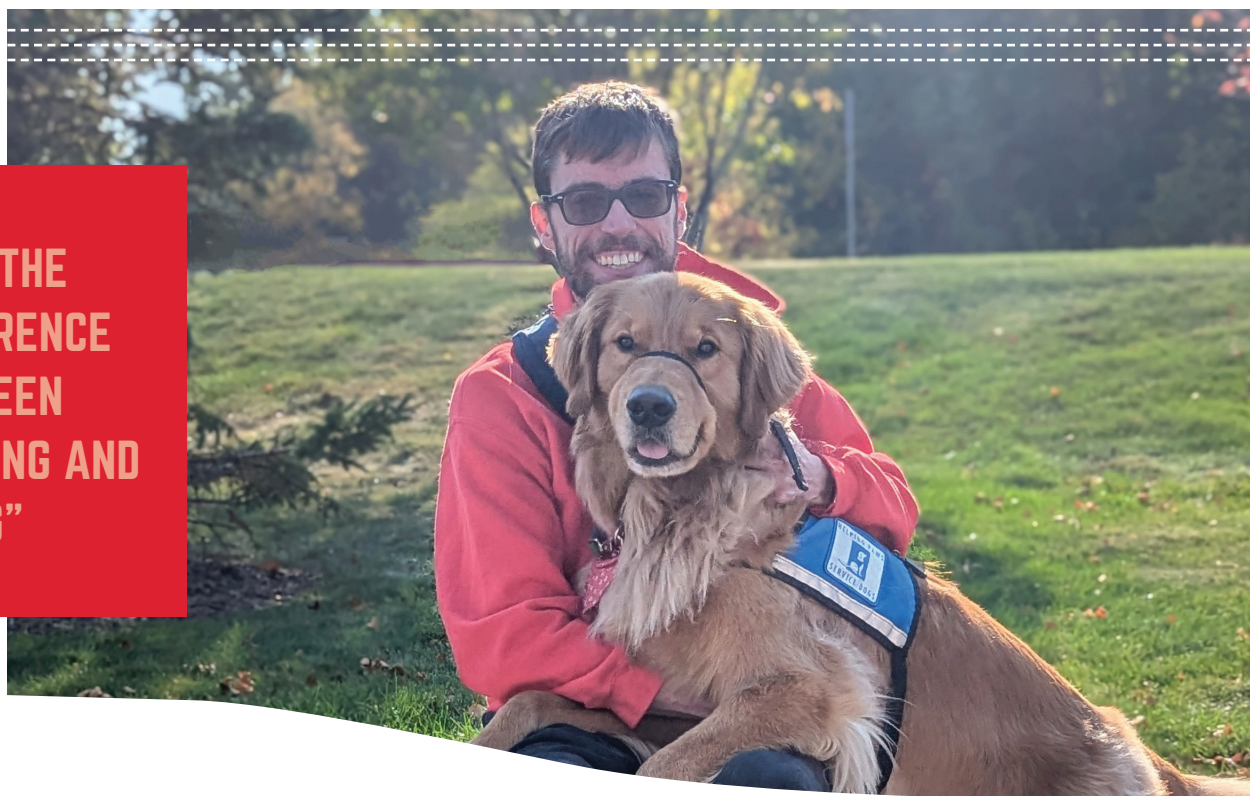
Normie senses the tiniest changes in my body: the tremor in my hand, the wobble in my stride, even shifts in my breathing. When my blood pressure drops, he slows down with me. If I need help standing, he braces. If I drop something, he picks it up with a wagging tail and that “we got this” attitude. At my feet, he's solid as a rock—helping my oxygen levels rise while I rest.

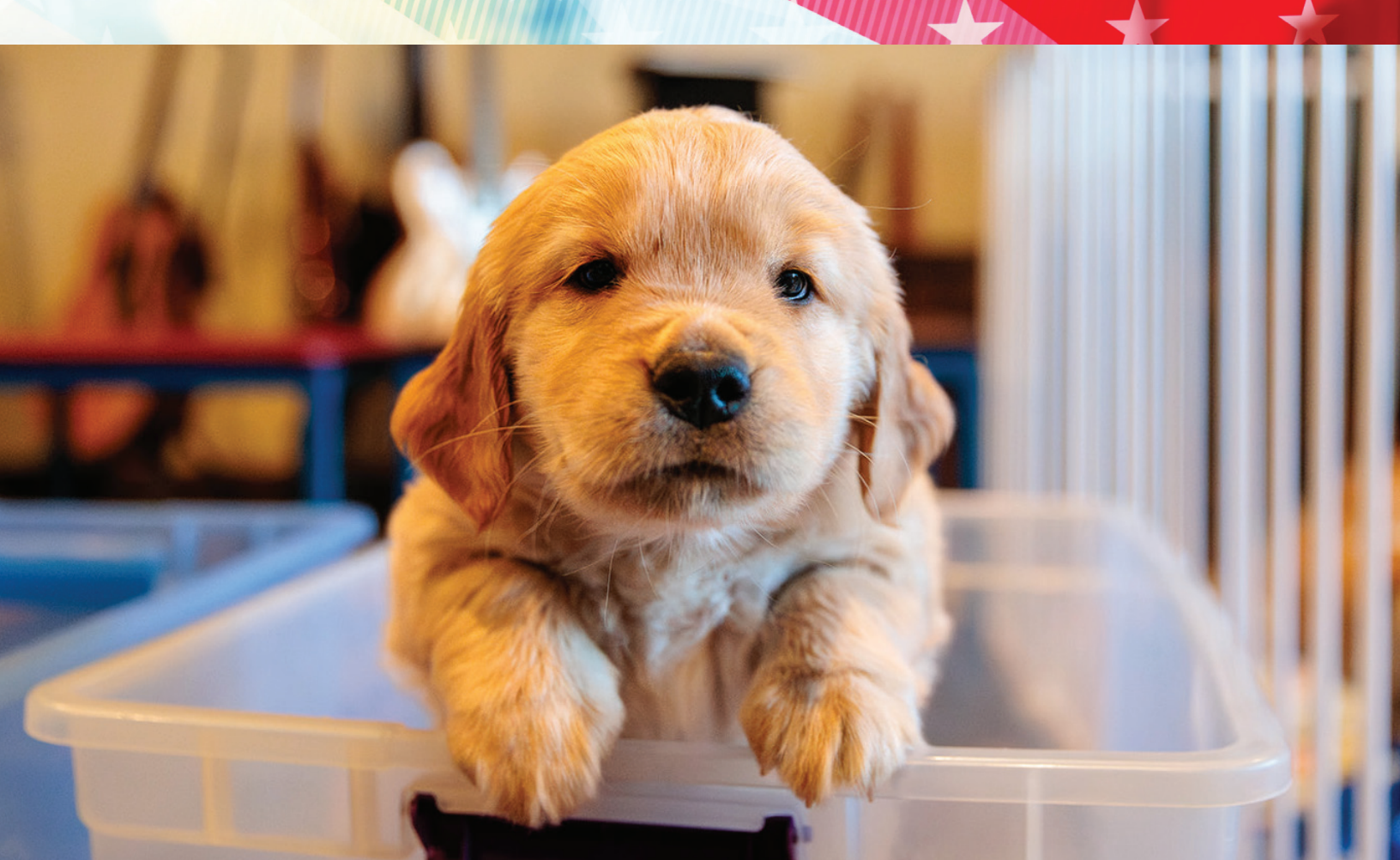
He goes everywhere with me—even to California, where he was the best travel buddy I could've asked for. He's at every doctor's appointment, every grocery run, every tough moment. And just recently, I got news that the regurgitation in my heart has improved—from 50% to 40%. The only real change in my life? Norm.

He's not just helping me live—he's helping me thrive. I even started a dog treat company inspired by him, because I wanted to build something around my hero. None of this would have been possible without him.

So thank you to Helping Paws for giving me this four-legged superhero. He's more than a service dog—he's the difference between existing and living. Your challenges might look different—chronic pain, anxiety, grief—but sometimes, the help you need shows up with four paws and a whole lot of heart.

“HE'S THE
DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN
EXISTING AND
LIVING”





DONORS

We are grateful to all the generous individuals, foundations, organizations and businesses supporting Helping Paws who share our passion for enhancing the lives of people with physical disabilities, veterans/first responders with PTSD and facility dog partnerships. If any donor name has been inadvertently omitted, we sincerely apologize and invite you to notify Helping Paws so we can correct the oversight.

Donations listed are from June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025

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Astro and A-Litter Siblings
Bauer Blue, Maui and Noel –
Team Blue
Beth Brown and Jordan
Stradtman
Lisa Bugman
Curt Buhl
Jack Carlos
Cathy and Jim's Wedding
Paula Dosland
Duke
Don Ellwood
Gala
Gary Diamond

Gogi
Susan Hagel
Barb Hegeness
Peter Hoffman
Judy Hovanes and Tim
Fitzpatrick
Humphrey
Julie Idzorek
Ivy
Andrew Januszewski
Brandy Jara
Jordan
Kaila
John F. Kaufman
Kodak
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Magic, Tigger, Theo, Dweasel,
Titan, Buddy, Bella, Izzy
Maverick
Cathy and Tim McNaughton
Jim and Cathy McNaughton
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Melinda Soule
Mia (My daughter's first HP
dog)
Milo and Baylor
Moose
Joyce Nelsen (correct spelling)
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Tyler Olson
Matthew Parrish

Puffy
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Wellington and Bentley
Schaefer
Pati Stokke
Julia Strauss
Dave Swanson
Tango
Milly Terriquez
Terry Conn
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Ella's Birthday

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Patrick Geiwitz
Jerome Gelhar
Annie Cinderella Hagel
Sisi Hutter
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Titan, Buddy, Bella and Izzy
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