



These dogs got your six: Maryville business provides free support dogs to vets, first responders

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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MARYVILLE - First responders and veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may greatly benefit from having support dogs adding to their quality of life.

Dogs trained by Got Your Six Support Dogs are specialized to cope with the special situations in which veterans and first responders are all-too familiar. After someone is approved for a service dog, he or she are invited to the training center in Maryville for a 10-day program. During that time, each person spends time with the dog to learn how to properly handle their new companion, and to spend some time with a certified counselor working toward a comprehensive trauma resilience program.

"It's a comprehensive program," Got Your Six Support Dogs Director of Administration Heather Chapman said. "We don't just place dogs and leave them. We follow through with them during the years they have the dogs."

The cost of each training dog, which are mostly retrievers (either golden or labs), is estimated to be around \$20,000 per dog, Chapman said. Money for the program, which again is free to the veterans and first responders approved, comes entirely from fundraisers.

One such fundraiser will take place July 29 with a kickball tournament and live music at Woodland Park in Collinsville from 1-8 p.m. Chapman said kickball will take place between 1-4 p.m. before music starts at four. Music is free, and will feature blues and bluegrass by artists, Greg Silsby and the Rum Drum Ramblers.

Services provided to veterans and first responders through the dogs include a great many things. During the 10 day training sessions, Chapman said the dogs will become tuned to the anxiety triggers of their veterans.

"Dogs can alert to anxiety," Chapman said. "Everybody has an anxiety tell, whether it's biting their nails or tapping their foot. We learn their tells, and train dogs. When they start getting anxious, dogs will paw at them, untie their shoes and do whatever to get vets out of their head and focus on learned skills to get a calm state."

The dogs can also provide relief for another major symptom of PTSD - rampant nightmares. Chapman said the service dogs can recognize someone having a nightmare, and they will wake them gently and even turn on the lights to help their companion re-acclimate to the surroundings.

More information and applications can be found on their [website](#) or [Facebook page](#).