

a perfect match

A MARYLAND NONPROFIT PAIRS DISABLED MILITARY VETERANS WITH SERVICE DOGS—ANIMALS RAISED AND CARED FOR BY LOCAL FAMILIES. BY LAURA DAILY

The pair's final exam had been fairly easy—answering questions, demonstrating skills, minding manners in public—but then the testers threw Ike a challenge. It was a plate of juicy, delicious beef stroganoff, sitting in the middle of a local grocery store—and he couldn't touch it. "He knows he can't have it," lamented Luke I. Wayman, who went on to reward his protégé with a treat for staying on task.

Ike is a black Labrador retriever. In January, he and Wayman, a former Army medic, became the first successful graduates of Hero Dogs, Inc. The Brookeville, Maryland-based nonprofit matches highly trained service dogs with military veterans

living in the region, free of charge.

Scientist, dog lover, and Brookeville resident Jennifer Lund, PhD, founded the organization. Lund, an electrical engineer by trade, grew up with dogs, and in graduate school began fostering puppies for guide-dog associations. While she worked in the field of neural prosthetics—devices implanted in the brain that interface between the brain and nervous system to control prosthetics, such as artificial eyes and limbs—Lund also became involved in training dogs, and she opened her own company, See Spot Sit, in 2002.

"But I wanted to do something more meaningful than housebreaking your puppy," she recalls, so she scoured the area for a service-dog program. "Thousands of military personnel return or rehabilitate here, but if they wanted a service dog, they usually had to go elsewhere. There's a huge learning curve and, for many veterans, leaving town for a service dog program... doesn't work."

Convinced she could craft a better model, Lund, also a married mother of two, founded Hero Dogs, Inc., and her first pup arrived in March 2010. The program requires two and a half years of animal training from start to finish. A puppy spends 14 months with a local foster family, then another six to eight months at the Hero Dogs facility, working with trainers on a daily basis to hone service skills. Only then are dogs matched with vets. The duo trains another six months, working together on tasks and solidifying their bond before final certification.

In April 2012, Lund introduced Wayman to Ike. Says Lund, "Traditional service dogs are taught to do a specific task—for instance, guide the blind, hear for the deaf, or assist someone in a wheelchair. Hero Dog clients have multiple challenges; maybe [it's] mobility, hearing loss, or psychiatric issues like PTSD. Our dogs can do it all: open and close doors, retrieve, alert to sounds, pick up things—you name it."

"Hero Dog clients might have mobility, hearing loss, or PTSD challenges. Our dogs can do it all."

—JENNIFER LUND



It takes two and a half years to train dogs like Ike.



Jennifer Lund utilizes a wheelchair in the training process.



Radar opening a cabinet.



Maverick carrying groceries.

“Hero Dogs become more vital to veterans like me, integrating back into civilian life.”

—LUKE WAYMAN

them and handed them to Luke,” she recalls. “Ike and I spent two years together, so before he would have brought them to me. I thought, ‘Now we know whose dog he is.’”

Hayman credits his canine companion with helping to ease his anxiety. Ike also alerts him to sounds like a ringing telephone. “He’s a good friend and partner who goes everywhere with me. More important, he forces me to think outside of myself, take on more burdens, and, in a good way, to push myself.”

And others are poised to benefit from Lund’s nonprofit. “As the full scope of PTSD comes to light, Hero Dogs becomes more vital for veterans like me integrating back into civilian life,” says Wayman. “But I’m biased,” he quips. “They gave me a dog.” 1-888-570-8653; hero-dogs.org **CF**

continued from 47

Lund now finds herself as a trainer, administrator, motivator, and fundraiser. “After my second child was born, I swore I wouldn’t go back to full-time work. That backfired,” she says with a laugh. Her days are filled with family matters, dog classes, staff meetings, attending events, and reviewing veterans’ program applications. “I’m surprised at how much stuff there is to do and how little time I get to spend with the dogs,” Lund admits.

Each Hero Dog costs about \$30,000 to train and match. Lund draws no salary, and more than 20 volunteers help at the kennels, in addition to dozens more who help out in other capacities. Her goal this year? To raise \$500,000 in cash and in-kind donations and match four dogs with veterans (two more applicants were matched with dogs in January). “Eventually someone will have to replace me to run the organization or to train the dogs,” she says. “I want it to grow bigger than me.”

If Ike and his new partner are any indication, Lund is on track. “I accidentally dropped my keys; Ike grabbed

Charity Register

OPPORTUNITIES TO GIVE.

LEUKEMIA BALL

The Cause: Provides funding for research toward finding a cure for leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin’s disease, and myeloma. The nonprofit also offers support to improve quality of life for patients and their families.

Founder: Rudolph and Antoinette de Villiers

How to Help: Attend the organization’s annual black-tie Leukemia Ball March 23 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. Enjoy dinner and dancing with musical entertainment from Jim Belushi, The Sacred Hearts band and stand-up by comedian Dana Carvey. 801 Mount Vernon Pl. NW, 703-399-2900; leukemiaball.org



2013 NATIONAL HOSPICE FOUNDATION GALA

The Cause: Supports and improves end-of-life care across the United States in conjunction with the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization.

Founder: Leaders of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

How to Help: Honor heroic pediatric patients April 26 at the 2013 gala, to be held inside the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center. If you can’t make the fête, support the foundation by donating a silent- or live-auction item. 201 Waterfront St., National Harbor, MD, 877-470-6472; nationalhospicefoundation.org



2013 PINK TIE PARTY

The Cause: Raises essential funds to support the National Cherry Blossom Festival, an organization dedicated to providing events and programs to showcase international culture, highlight natural beauty, and build community spirit.

Founder: Began as an all-volunteer organization with Diana May as the first full-time staff member.

How to Help: Put on a fun pink frock March 20 and celebrate the blooming of DC’s beloved cherry blossom trees at the Renaissance Washington, DC Downtown Hotel. Enjoy cherry- and blossom-themed cuisine from more than 30 of the area’s top restaurants. Ninth St. NW, 202-661-7567; nationalcherryblossomfestival.org

BE THE CARE

The Cause: Maintains a full-service health center serving diverse communities in Washington, providing medical, dental, and mental health care with expertise in LGBT communities and those living with HIV/AIDS.

Founder: Whitman-Walker Health is an independent organization, origins of which stemmed from a program at the Washington Free Clinic.

How to Help: Make a donation to Whitman-Walker through its website or purchase tickets to the annual Be the Care event, scheduled for April 18 at the National Museum of Women in the Arts. 1250 New York Ave. NW, 202-745-7000; whitman-walker.org



RIT OF GENEROSITY

Army veteran
Luke Wayman
and Ike were
paired by
Hero Dogs.

