

# Service Dogs for Veterans

## Newsletter—April 2024

*Fighting PTSD One Service Dog at a Time*

*Mission Statement: To complement traditional treatment for Veterans with PTSD, TBI and MST, by training Veteran and dog to become highly effective ADA Compliant Service Dog Teams.*

[www.sd4v.org](http://www.sd4v.org)



## First Quarter 2024 Graduates

*"With a full heart of gratitude, I thank SD4V's donors so much"—  
Jeff Verkon*



### Jeff Verkon & Rhett

Jeff Verkon served in the US Army from 1993 to 1997 and 2001 to 2004 in the National Guard. His intense specialized training included time in the air, land and sea which served him well in numerous drug interdiction missions. It was during this time he was involved in several airborne and training accidents sustaining a variety of injuries including a number of concussions. Once home and in a state of near constant pain, Jeff found himself spending a lot of time at home.

When another Veteran suggested SD4V, Jeff decided to enroll with his dog, Rhett, a Soft Coated Wheaten. Despite Jeff's doubts in the early days of training, they began functioning more and more as a Service Team. As training progressed, so did Jeff's confidence as he slowly began to venture out with Rhett in situations that had been uncomfortable in the past.

Jeff and Rhett have mastered tasks Lean, Center and Front. These tasks clearly define personal space and reinforce boundaries. Lean has proven to be one of the most useful tasks with Rhett adding his own touch—a paw across Jeff's left foot. Jeff is immensely grateful to the SD4V donors who made this possible. Congratulations to SD4V's 139th Service Dog Team!

### Eric Babb & Luna

Eric Babb, a former law enforcement officer, originally graduated from SD4V in 2017 alongside his dog, Shalom. As Shalom has grown older, he has felt the need to have a younger service dog allowing Shalom to transition into more of a therapy dog role. Subsequently, he and his Belgium Malinois mix, Luna, enrolled and began training. Additionally, Eric's wife, Marlene, is planning to retire from the Air Force Reserve in September after a 30 year career.

The early days of training with Luna proved to be very difficult, mostly due to her age—she was only 6 months old. After a year long break, they re-entered SD4V training, this time with a more mature Luna who was ready to learn.

The most frequently used task for this team has been Center. This is very calming in public settings and is beneficial in navigating crowds. Congratulations to SD4V 140th Service Dog Team.

*"The SD4V Program has allowed me to get my life back."  
- Eric Babb*



*"SD4V has been the missing part of my healing,"*  
- Cindy Willson

### Cindy Willson & Maisie



Cindy served 10 years in the US Air Force including deployments for Desert Shield/ Desert Storm and after-Operation support. She spent time in Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Once home, she struggled with anxiety and found herself lacking the confidence to be in public settings comfortably. With Covid isolation, these issues worsened and she knew it was time for some help. As she began exploring options, she discovered SD4V. Having recently adopted Maisie, she applied and soon after began training.

During training, Cindy not only made impressive progress with Maisie, but also found the camaraderie and community she'd been missing. The love and support restored her confidence and helped her continue to heal. She felt as if she "belonged" again. As training progressed, she and Maisie became a team and became each other's best friend.

Cindy has trained Maisie in Center, Cover, Block and Push. All of these bring a sense of safety in public settings and help to control anxiety. Maisie's presence also provides comfort at home, always nearby providing that extra sense of security.

Going forward, Cindy hopes to be involved with SD4V helping other Veterans enrolled in the program. Congratulations of SD4Vs 141st Service Dog Team!

**Since 2014, SD4V has graduated 141 Service Dog Teams and 52 companion dog teams.**

**43 Teams in training as of March 2024**

**16 Veterans' applications in process**

*Thank you to our loyal donors who made this possible!*

**SERVICE DOGS FOR VETERANS**

100% PROCEEDS TO SD4V

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