

## **Inmates serve as pet trainers Dogs groomed to be assistants for the disabled**

By Michael Woyton  
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FISHKILL - Ian Finlay just got a new dog.

Her name is Gracie, and she's a 7-month-old golden retriever. Finlay will train the dog for obedience with commands that will enable her to work as a service animal for someone who is disabled.

Gracie will be at Finlay's side just about 24 hours a day, except when another volunteer takes her on outings.

That is something the 34-year-old Mount Vernon resident can't do because he is incarcerated at Fishkill Correctional Facility.

He has been in prison for 17 years, having been convicted of homicide.

"I messed up horribly, and I'm paying the price for it," Finlay said. "This lets me do something about it."

Finlay is part of the Puppies Behind Bars program, founded in 1997 by Gloria Gilbert Stoga. The philosophy, she said, is inmates in maximum and medium security prisons are provided a way to give back to society.

"At the same time," Gilbert Stoga said, "they are given a skill."

Puppies Behind Bars started at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility with five puppies.

The program is now in seven correctional institutions, with about 100 puppies being raised and trained.

The dogs live in the cells with their primary handler and attend class once a week, led by Puppies Behind Bars trainers.