



Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

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NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS AND COMMUNITY SUPERVISION & PUPPIES BEHIND BARS CELEBRATE TRAINING GRADUATION AT FISHKILL CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

DOCCS Acting Commissioner and Major General Patrick Murphy, the Adjutant General of New York, attend Puppies Behind Bars Graduation Ceremony for returning overseas veterans

ALBANY - The Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) and Puppies Behind Bars (PBB) today celebrated the training graduation of four US Marine veterans and four Labrador puppies at Fishkill Correctional Facility. PBB trains inmates to become puppy-raisers to raise service dogs for wounded veterans and the blind and explosive detection canines for law enforcement.

PBB, which is a nationally recognized privately funded non-profit organization, pays all puppy training and veteran's expenses. The organization began operations in July of 1997 at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility and the program has expanded to include male inmates at Otisville, Fishkill and Downstate Correctional Facilities.

The puppies arrived at Fishkill Correctional Facility and Bedford Hills Correctional Facility at eight weeks old and remain residents until they are approximately 24 months old and live and attend programs with the puppy-raiser during the duration of the training. Puppies are taught over 80 commands, obedience and guide dog skills, and are housebroken. Puppies selected to be Explosive Detection Canines (EDC) are taught specific commands and skills necessary for their assignment.

As the end of training approaches, PBB pairs the dogs with returning overseas veterans from across the United States. The four veteran recipients of today's graduating class of puppies include Corporal Rafeal Banks (California), Sergeant John James Brode (Colorado), Corporal Christopher Guffey (Tennessee) and Sergeant Al Sionni (Maine). All served tours in Iraq, Afghanistan or both and suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The Marines arrived in New York on July 21st and have spent the past several weeks being paired with their service dog learning how to work with their dog in order to lessen the impact of their Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI).

During this two-phase training period, the veterans live with the puppies in the community while working closely with a PBB instructor and returning to Fishkill daily for training. The training in the prison consists of the puppy raisers teaching the veterans over 80 commands, how to read the dog's body language, basic medical care and what their rights are to enter public places

Today, there are 48 puppies in training as service dogs and 27 puppies in Explosive Detection Canine (EDC) training. Since the programs inception, 584 dogs have graduated from the program to become service dogs, Explosive Detection Canine (EDC), companion dogs, therapy dogs, as well as guide dogs.

Acting DOCCS Commissioner Anthony J. Annucci said, "Though it will never be possible to sufficiently thank our veterans for their service and sacrifice for our country, unquestionably, the Puppies Behind Bars program is a significant step toward properly recognizing and assisting these veterans. I am proud of our staff and the inmates who have worked tirelessly with these dogs, preparing them for their time to serve."

"I'm proud to represent the New York National Guard and armed forces at this event and on behalf of all the men and women who serve and have served I want to thank the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision and the inmates at Fishkill Correctional Facility for their involvement in this program," said Major General Patrick Murphy, the Adjutant General of New York.

As many as 300,000 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan cope with some symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and while the definitive research on whether or not therapy dogs can help veterans deal with this stress is not yet in, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to show that these dogs make a real impact on improving a veterans quality of life," Murphy said.

"I never knew I could have a relationship like this with a dog," said Chris Guffey, who served two tours in Afghanistan. "George" (my service dog), is truly my battle buddy, something I have missed tremendously since I've come home from war. I can tell him anything and he still loves me."

Puppies Behind Bars instructor Peggy Vance said, "Team training turns the world upside down. Veterans come into prison to trust again. Inmates contribute to society. Vets and inmates reach beyond what they thought possible. And it is all due to the unconditional love that our dogs provide both constituencies."

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