



# NEADS HERE AND NOW

NEADS World Class Service Dogs Change Lives

FALL 2023

## From the CEO

Greetings from NEADS.

As fall approaches, we are gearing up for one of our favorite annual events.

**Get Dressed. Give Back** takes place at The Exchange, in Boston's Seaport District, on

**Friday, September 29.** I know many of you have been involved since our first "Get Dressed" in 2015, and if you have already come on board this year, thank you! We would love to have other businesses and individuals join us through a Get Dressed. Give Back sponsorship. You can find more about the event on page 4.



We also invite you to our **2023 Fall Graduation on Sunday, November 5** to celebrate our newest Service Dog and Assistance Dog teams. The afternoon features graduates sharing their stories of how having a Service Dog has changed their lives. Stay for a celebratory cake after the ceremony.

This newsletter offers some insights into two different aspects of our program – the history of our "string dogs" and how temperament testing plays a role in the selection of puppies for our program. We are thrilled, too, to share a guest article by Chaplain Christina Pryor Pittman, who was matched with Assistance Dog Avalon in 2019.

Thank you as always for the many ways you support NEADS. It's with your support that we can change lives by breeding, raising, and training World Class Service Dogs.

Gerry DeRoche, Chief Executive Officer

## A listening ear, a warm, calm presence

*By U.S. Air Force Chaplain (Maj.) Christina Pryor Pittman, DMin.*

In early 2018, I realized just how much the airmen at McEntire Joint National Guard Base could benefit from therapeutic animal interactions after I brought in two young dogs and a cat for resiliency visits following a loss. I saw how the mood lifted as engagement with the animals brought new life and opened lines of communication. I knew then that animal visits needed to continue, and I developed a plan for incorporating a trained assistance dog in my work of providing mental, emotional, and spiritual care for the members at the base.

I was referred to NEADS by my Mental Health Integration for Chaplain Services course supervisor, and the idea of acquiring an assistance dog for ministry at McEntire became a reality. Less than a year after I was accepted, I received the call that I was matched with Assistance Dog Avalon.

When I first saw her, I teared up with joy and gratitude - our airmen, their families, and veterans would know the unconditional love and comfort of this special creature as she helped me build the heart and mind connection.

Avalon and I were welcomed with open arms by commanders and airmen alike when we arrived back from training at NEADS. This base support provided the undergirding for Avalon to be the first United States Air Force Therapeutic Support Dog for military under the Surgeon General's Human Animal Bond Program. The Department of Defense Therapeutic Support Dog program was started for the integration of certified organizational assistance dogs to beneficially support our service members.

Avalon has done so much in such a short time as we care for and minister to military personnel and veterans. Already her footprints are in hospitals and schools, at military honor funerals, churches, homes, the Air Force Chaplain Corps College at Maxwell Air Force Base (AFB), the South Carolina Adjutant General's offices, the Air National Guard Readiness Center at Andrews AFB, Shaw AFB, Fairchild AFB, Charleston AFB, Sheppard AFB, Keesler AFB, Army installations, Navy/Marine chaplaincy and even the Republic of Colombia in South America. We have also deployed as an Assistance Dog team, bringing with us a piece of home to strengthen the service members' resiliency in the mission as they adapt to being away from home.

*(continued on p.3)*



Chaplain Christina Pryor Pittman was matched with Assistance Dog Avalon in 2019



Inside NEADS

What is "String Training"?

by Kathy Foreman, Director of Canine Development

When a Service Dog in Training is ready for its final finish training, it is placed with either a prison program handler or a NEADS trainer. We call the dogs placed with our trainers "string dogs," but where did this term originate?

The term "string dogs" came from the way our dogs were trained when we first opened the Princeton campus. We had a limited prison program at that time. Each trainer had 7-9 dogs that lived on campus and were trained daily by that trainer. These dogs were called the trainer's string of dogs. We have continued to use "string dog" to identify a dog assigned to a specific trainer that is being trained on campus after it leaves the Full-Time Raiser program and continues into final task training. The string dog resides in the Hawkins Canine Center during the work week and usually goes out for the weekend with an assigned Weekend Puppy Raiser.



Four of the String Dogs currently working with NEADS trainers

Temperament Testing:  
Selecting and Assessing Future NEADS Service Dogs

by Kate Albertini and Megan Kropf, NEADS Breeding & Puppy Development

One key trait of a Service Dog is its ability to connect and bond with its human partner. We seek dogs that naturally turn to their partner for guidance.

Before leaving the NEADS Breeding Center, typically around 7.5 weeks of age, each puppy undergoes a standardized behavioral assessment to identify its reaction to various environmental stimuli. We use the Behavior Checklist (BCL) to assess its strengths and weaknesses and how it interacts with handlers. Our goal is to gauge its confidence in various situations, so during the test, the puppy encounters different surfaces, wears a training cape, and is exposed to novel statues and loud noises. If a puppy is ever unsure of an object during the test, we like to see it looking to the handler for support in order to gain confidence and become self-assured enough to move forward.

The BCL, along with observations noted by the Breeding team during the puppy's first weeks of life, helps create a puppy's profile. This profile guides us in matching the puppy with a prison program handler or Full-Time Puppy Raiser as it takes the next step in its journey toward becoming a Service Dog.



You're invited!  
NEADS Fall 2023 Graduation

Join our newest NEADS Service Dog and Assistance Dog teams, their friends and families, as well as NEADS staff, volunteer Puppy Raisers, and supporters as we come together to recognize these life-changing partnerships.

Sunday, November 5  
2pm - 4pm

Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School  
(Monty Tech)  
1050 Westminster Street (Rt 2A)  
Fitchburg, MA 01420

Unable to attend in person? Watch the ceremony live on the NEADS Facebook page (facebook.com/NEADSdogs)

\* Please be aware that Monty Tech has a Service Dogs only policy as recognized by the ADA



Fall 2023 graduate Jim Heroux and Service Dog for Hearing Hazel

"I've never been much of a morning person, but that's changed since Hazel arrived.

She wakes me up at the sound of my alarm, and now I am laughing with her even before I get out of bed and look forward to taking on the day.

Thank you again for Miss Hazel."

Raise a Puppy, Change Your Life

If you live in New England, love puppies, love to help, and would love to make a change in the community, please join us!

NEADS World Class Service Dogs change lives every day, and you can be part of this life-changing story when you volunteer as a Puppy Raiser. Visit [neads.org/raiser](https://neads.org/raiser) or scan the QR code for details.



(A listening ear, continued from p. 1)

I am humbled to be a part of this historic pioneering of the use of assistance dogs with active military service members and veterans. The innovation she brings to the mental, emotional, and spiritual care of our service members and veterans is life changing. Avalon is their comforter, playmate, and friend seeking to engage with all receptive service members. She does not like to leave anyone out and will look to me for approval and to give the command, "Avalon, say hello" when a new person approaches a group.

When she is not working or training, Avalon is a family dog. My children enjoy the privilege of caring for her and sharing life adventures.

Avalon and I wish to leave a memory and an impact that life can be done differently. To show that we don't have to walk this journey alone and there are special resources, people waiting and wanting to help. We appreciate NEADS for a gift impossible to measure. Our gratefulness is life-long in the spirit of all those who have met Avalon and are transformed by her selfless service.







NEADS World Class Service Dogs  
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Princeton, MA 01541

(978) 422-9064 | neads.org



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## NEADS World Class Service Dogs change lives

### Annual Fundraiser to Support NEADS WORLD CLASS SERVICE DOGS

Join us for an evening on Boston Harbor  
featuring fantastic food, live music, an open bar,  
exclusive shopping, and a silent auction.

#### Presenting Sponsor

Larry & Nanine Costa

#### Evening's Host

Keith McGilvery  
Fox 61 News Anchor

#### Keynote Speaker

Tiziana Dearing  
Host of Radio Boston, WBUR

#### Working Service Dog Team Presenter

Patrick Cogan &  
NEADS Service Dog Knight



#### When



Sept. 29, 2023  
6:30 - 11:00 p.m.

#### Where



THE EXCHANGE  
212 Northern Ave.  
Boston, MA  
**FREE** ON SITE PARKING!

#### Tickets, Sponsorship & Ad Opportunities

visit [neads.org/GDGB2023](https://neads.org/GDGB2023)



LIVE MUSIC



OPEN BAR



AFTER PARTY SNACKS  
BY MELT

Thank you to those businesses and individuals who are already supporting NEADS through a Get Dressed. Give Back. sponsorship, including: Gift Sponsor: **Abaris Financial Group**; Outdoor Seating & Fire Pit Sponsor: **Enterprise Wealth Management**; Corporate Sponsors: **Blue Buffalo**; **The Black Dog**; **Burke Distributing Corp**; Entertainment Sponsor: **Maureen Manning**; Food Truck Sponsor & Silent Auction: **in Honor of Service Dog Maurice's Retirement**; Gold Sponsors: **Martha Coakley**, **Laura McTaggart & Tom Nolan**; and Silver Sponsors: **the Cogan Family**, **Gerry & Kathie DeRoche**, **East Coast Telcom Solutions**, **Sue Feit**, **Leominster Credit Union**, and **Robert & Patricia Sumner**