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## Guard veteran trains service dogs to help other veterans live comfortable lives

MADILYN SCHOTT

May 28, 2021

A few years ago, Trisha Fowler, 31, started Got Your Six Dog Training as a small training and boarding service in her home.

In November 2019, she expanded to a larger facility and asked Premium Pets and Kitty's Critter Care to share their location with her.

Today, the three small businesses run out of the same building in Jefferson City, all addressing animal care.

For a while, Fowler was able to balance both her military position with the Missouri National Guard and her business. But as Got Your Six grew, Fowler decided it was time to focus on the dogs.

Within the past year, Fowler put in her leave with the Guard to focus on the business.

Now she trains service dogs for veterans. A nonprofit operation called Sierra Delta helps by covering costs for the dogs. Fowler also gives donated dogs to veterans at no cost to them and manages all the training.

"Not a lot of veterans reach out for help," she said. "So if they know that the person helping them is a veteran and can relate to their situation, it can help a lot."

Some of the dogs are donated or come from a shelter. While not all dogs make it through the process, Fowler trains the dogs in obedience and finds good homes for them.

She interviews veterans to determine what tasks a dog must do to serve them. Most have experienced PTSD, other psychiatric conditions or mobility issues.

The dogs help them navigate comfortably in public and perform other tasks they otherwise might find difficult. Choosing the right dog for the veteran also means finding a connection between the two.

It is a wonderful feeling when she finds a veteran and dog that are right for each other, Fowler said. The bond that can form between a veteran and dog is inspiring to witness.

Ashley Volkart, 22, is a trainer and kennel master at Got Your Six. After working with veterans and service dogs, she recalls an amazing experience watching them connect.

“Watching a service dog change somebody’s life is the greatest feeling in the world,” Volkart said.

The veteran and dog are trained together for 16 weeks. Fowler said it’s important to train a veteran to handle the dog and train the dog to address a specific need.

“Not only do we train the dog, but we have to make sure that owners follow up with the training,” Fowler said.

This type of training can be a serious commitment for an owner. Consistency and time are crucial to training the dogs properly.

“The number one thing every dog needs is obedience,” Volkart said. “A dog needs a solid obedience foundation to even start becoming a service dog.”

Food motivation works well in guiding the dogs and building their confidence. Working in new environments after obedience training helps a dog coexist in its environment.

On a typical morning, Fowler starts by letting the dogs out at 7 a.m. and then spends the entire day training them. Dogs that have been through a few weeks of training are taken off the property and exposed to new environments as Fowler works to get the dogs acclimated to new places.

The amount of time to complete the training can vary widely. Each dog is different, and the typical day depends on what each dog needs.

“You have to figure out what works best for these dogs,” Fowler said.

Fowler said she has been working with dogs since she was 10 years old and has accumulated considerable experience working with service dogs over the years.

She worked with canine handlers in the National Guard, as well as their dogs, and also trained dogs on the front lines for a while.

“Working with canine handlers gave me a lot of experience,” Fowler said.

Once she began training service dogs for her own company, Fowler found that her business began to grow.

“It took off really quickly,” she said.

She joined the Missouri National Guard in 2008 and became a military police officer. She was active in the Missouri National Guard in Jefferson City for seven years, ending after serving a full 12 years.

Volkart has worked with Fowler for over a year. She said people don’t always realize Got Your Six often rescues dogs from shelters and can prevent them from being put down.

“We treat these dogs like they are our own,” Volkart said. “We’ve got their backs for the rest of their lives.”

Maddie Neeley, a Kitty’s Critter Care employee, knew she had to take her dog to Fowler when he started barking and growling uncontrollably at people.

“Trisha is the best of the best, and I only want the best for my dog,” Neely said.

Her white Labrador, Eli, became a different dog during his training, she said, as he learned to be calmer and less stressed in public.

The “communication and listening between the dog and the owner is so much better,” she said.

Veterans who leave with a service dog are always encouraged to return when necessary, Fowler said.

“They are always part of the Got Your Six team for life,” Fowler said.

## Business details

**What:** Got Your Six Dog Training

**Who:** Trisha Fowler

**Where:** 1005 Big Horn Drive, Jefferson City, MO 65109

**When:** Open 24 hours

**Contact information:** 573-280-9057

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## Madilyn Schott

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