



Puppies
Behind
Bars



SPRING 2020

www.puppiesbehindbars.com



Photos: U.S. Air National Guard Senior Airman Sean Madden and P.B.B.

ANSWERING THE CALL

"We knew as soon as the call came in that we would help," says P.B.B.'s president, Gloria Gilbert Stoga. "Our dogs' entire lives are spent in training to serve." It was the second week in April, and the New York National Guard wanted to know if P.B.B. could send dogs to comfort the young soldiers (barely into their twenties) who were stationed in Manhattan responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. The immediate response was, "Absolutely," followed by, "Let's figure out the logistics."

The logistics were a bit of a challenge, but because P.B.B. is a small, nimble, non-bureaucratic organization, it has always been able to respond quite quickly to its community and the nation's needs. Within months of the September 11 attacks, P.B.B. was moving to raise explosive-detection canines for law enforcement, as the need for such dogs skyrocketed. In 2006, it turned from raising guide dogs for the blind to focus on raising service dogs for the men and women returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan with physical and emotional wounds. Now, in the midst of a pandemic, it was seizing another opportunity to step in.

More than any words possibly could, the pictures above express the joy, the healing, the laughter, and the love that P.B.B. dogs have been able to provide—not only to the soldiers, but also to some of the nurses on the frontlines of the

New York City pandemic, who were being housed in the Times Square Marriott hotel. As Capt. Yvette Valle told the National Guard news service, "It gives them a piece of family, a closeness that we can't experience due to social distancing. They can get that through the dogs. It gives them love and warmth that they are sacrificing being here for this cause."

What the photos don't show is the impact on the P.B.B. staff, who volunteered enthusiastically to make that happen. With regular programs on hold (see stories inside for more about P.B.B.'s COVID-19 response), they welcomed the chance to support some of the pandemic's true heroes. "It has given us new purpose; it has given us a means of giving something back ourselves; and it has reinforced—even though we did not really need reinforcement—that the purity of our dogs' love can transcend darkness," says Gilbert Stoga.

The effect inside the six correctional facilities with P.B.B. programs has been transformative too, she adds: "Sitting in prison, feeling even more helpless than do we on the outside, all of a sudden the inmates, through the dogs they have raised, are doing something to help. Their sense of accomplishment, of pride, and of increased self-esteem shows just how important it is for people, no matter who or where they are, to be able to contribute in a time of crisis."

THE PUPS ARE ALL RIGHT!

Anyone with a furry companion at home has probably noticed that while humans are struggling with the pandemic, the animals seem fine. The same is true at Puppies Behind Bars. The staff has its hands full devising strategies to keep the organization running smoothly—and to meet the new opportunities to make a difference. The pups are going strong.

When the shutdown began, visits to New York State and New Jersey correctional facilities were suspended, for the health and safety of inmates and prison staff. While this meant P.B.B. instructors could no longer teach the puppy raisers, the decision was made to leave the dogs inside. “We had the assurance of the N.Y. and N.J. departments of corrections that they will continue to receive outdoor recreation time and their usual 24/7 loving care from inmate puppy-raisers,” reports P.B.B.’s Eric Barsness. “The puppies, who are happy and well



cared for in the facilities, serve an important role there. They give a sense of continuity and purpose, not to mention unconditional love, to our raisers, and brighten the atmosphere for staff and other inmates.”

But for the pups to continue to grow into well-adjusted working dogs, they still need to be socialized to sights, sounds, people, and experiences outside the prison gates. So P.B.B. staffers have taken on that job, traveling to the six prisons every Monday to pick up two pups from the program and return two others. The dogs spend the week in the staffers’ homes: some in apartments, where they meet neighbors in the halls, ride in elevators, and walk city streets; others in houses with large yards or access to parks and woodlands, where they can run and swim in lakes. One staff member lives surrounded by dairy farm pastures, so the dogs who visit him each week get used to cows as a part of the scenery.

“Everyone is happy to have the opportunity to monitor the puppies’ progress, and all of us enjoy seeing how excited the dogs are to return to prison and their inmate puppy-raisers, after a fun-filled week of adventures,” says Barsness. “It tells us what a great job the puppy-raisers are doing, and how happy the puppies are in their day-to-day lives behind bars.”



Photos: P.B.B.

WORKBOOK CLUB

To help keep the inmate puppy-raisers fully engaged and constructively occupied during a period without visits from instructors, P.B.B. has created a series of workbooks for them. There are now 13 volumes, each 40 to 50 pages long, containing puzzles, word games, informative articles, quizzes, cartoons, and other materials meant to stimulate, amuse, and



educate—all connected to the theme of puppy-raising or animal care. Rising to the challenge, the inmates have organized their own classes during the shutdown, using the workbooks as guides and helping each other with the challenges of different phases of puppy training. P.B.B. is grateful for the cooperation of the prison staff in distributing the workbooks, for the contributions of volunteers to their contents, and to the puppy-raisers for continuing to focus on raising the best possible service dogs and explosive-detection canines—pandemic or no pandemic.

FROM PAWS TO POSIES

The Paws & Reflect program matches homebound New York City seniors with dedicated P.B.B. volunteers, who bring a puppy to visit them on a regular basis. The program offers excellent socialization opportunities for service-dogs-in-training, as well as canine and human companionship for seniors living alone. For the safety of all, the program has been suspended, but P.B.B. is having local florists deliver bouquets to the seniors every two weeks, and is checking in regularly by phone. The flowers and calls brighten their homes and hearts until visits can be resumed.



McDonald's curbside service.
Photo: Heather McClelland

THE BUDDY SYSTEM

More than 70 police officers, firefighters, New York State correctional department personnel, and representatives of federal agencies, including the F.B.I. and A.T.F., attended a conference organized by P.B.B. on March 3. Its goal was to send three important messages: First and foremost, that P.B.B. appreciates and supports first responders and wants to thank them for protecting and serving their communities. Second, that with its "Backup Buddy" program P.B.B. can provide service dogs for police officers and firefighters who struggle with P.T.S.D. and other injuries. Third, that P.B.B. will place dogs with police and fire departments to serve as therapeutic outlets and to assist with community relations.

Speakers at the symposium included Groton, Conn. police officer Heather McClelland, with her service dog McDonald. McClelland talked about how she has incorporated McDonald into her work as a community liaison and Officer Wellness Program coordinator. The chief of the Groton P.D., Louis J. Fusaro, outlined the criteria for selecting a Backup Buddy handler, including the financial ramifications, and praised McDonald's impact on the general health of the department. Brian Andrews, a retired N.Y.P.D. and Port Authority officer who received his service dog, Pete, in May 2018, talked about his experience of going into prison to train, working directly with inmates who taught him how to use and care for the service dog that would change his life.

—continued on next page



Participants at the P.B.B. conference, top. Heather McClelland shares her experience.
Photos: Laurie White



A conference canine, top. The N.Y.P.D.'s Ken Quick makes a point.
Photos: Laurie White

In smaller breakout sessions, Andrews, McClelland, and other P.B.B. service-dog recipients shared their experiences; Ryan Cantatore (with Matt), a firefighter from Rye Brook, N.Y.; and Darryl Vandermarck (with Patriot), a firefighter from Orange County, N.Y., were among them. In the afternoon, Deputy Inspector Kenneth Quick of the N.Y.P.D. described the toll police work takes on officers and their families. Noting the alarming rates of officer suicides and the responsibilities of department heads, local governments, and the public to address officer wellness, he emphasized the valuable roles that have been played by P.B.B. dogs, both with individual first responders and within police departments.

Thanks to the speakers, the Edith Macy Conference Center staff, and especially those essential participants—the dogs—all of whom helped increase awareness of the powerful effects of P.B.B.’s work.

SUPERDOG COMES TO THE SUPERMARKET

Larry Dawkins has not only been a volunteer puppy-sitter for almost two decades, but for many years he’s done the time-consuming and essential job of scheduling all the outings for puppies at the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility in Clinton, N.J. He recently told P.B.B. how his work with the dogs has become even more meaningful—especially to the staff at his local supermarket, who’ve been on the front lines:

“I have been going to Shoprite for years, as one of the many places I go to socialize our P.B.B. puppies. Last year, one of the managers asked if I would be able to visit the employees in their break room to bring some smiles to their faces and help break up the day. So, I started visiting them once a month, sometimes with one or two other sitters. Needless to say, they thoroughly enjoyed it.

“Since the pandemic, I try to visit once a week, walking throughout the store to chat with the employees and break up their very busy day. The customers enjoy seeing the puppies also. The comments range from ‘You made my day’ to ‘Thank you for doing this. It means a lot to me and my coworkers.’

“It’s just my small part in trying to be positive and helpful.”

IN MEMORIAM

Puppies Behind Bars lost one of its earliest and greatest supporters on May 2, when Lori Gevalt died from complications due to Parkinson’s. When Gloria Gilbert Stoga founded P.B.B. in 1997, Gevalt was the first person she asked to be on the board of directors. “Lori was a dynamic, passionate supporter of Puppies, always willing to offer her advice and her time, and was a generous host of many P.B.B. board meetings and cocktail fundraisers,” Gilbert Stoga says. “In its early years, Lori helped sustain Puppies; in her later years, being part of Puppies helped sustain her. We are very lucky to have had her. Our hearts are with her family.”



PUPPY OF THE WEEK

Over the years, hundreds and hundreds of volunteers have played an essential part in the successful raising of more than 1,200 P.B.B. working dogs. They go through hours of training, then they give their time to bring puppies out into the wider world for day-long trips or overnight stays. While our volunteers are currently unable to visit the prisons to take dogs home, they continue to care deeply about the puppies and to want information about them. So P.B.B. has started a Puppy of the Week update, distributed by email to all 225-plus volunteers. Here's a sample from Carina, a pup in training at the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility in New Jersey, who was visiting a P.B.B. staffer.

Hello everyone! I'm Carina, Puppy of the Week.

This is my first spring ever, since I am only six months old, and although I enjoy the feel of wet snow melting on my nose, I am convinced that April is so far the best month of the year.

Monday morning was perfect Labrador weather at EMCF—misty and damp. Jan and Joan took me into a small town I've visited before, but this time the front yards of the houses we passed were ablaze with flowers. They got me to pose in front of different flowers, and I pretended to sniff

them even though the best smells were in the grass where dogs I've never met left urine scents which told me everything I needed to know about them, or in the thickets of myrtle where it was fun to poke my nose.

Here I am pretending to enjoy the scent of a tulip...



Photo: P.B.B.

Your support for our work means a great deal to us, and your gift to Puppies Behind Bars may now have added benefits for you when you file your 2020 income tax return.

The Covid-19 Stimulus Package (CARES), passed by Congress and signed into law on March 27, entitles taxpayers who take the standard deduction to claim an additional \$300 in deductions on their 2020 tax return for cash donations made to a nonprofit charity such as P.B.B. Taxpayers who itemize deductions can deduct 100% of their charitable donations to a qualified public charity against their 2020 adjusted gross income.

PLEASE ACCEPT MY DONATION FOR:

- Sponsor a puppy—your puppy will join our program in the next 12 months (\$6,000)
- Routine veterinary care for one puppy for a year (\$850)
- One service-dog vest with patches (\$100)
- A new sleeping crate (\$85)
- Food for a puppy for one month (\$70)
- Hands-free lead for a service-dog trainer (\$30)
- New toys for one puppy (\$10)
- Other amount: \$ _____
- Check enclosed: \$ _____

Please make checks payable to Puppies Behind Bars.

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trains prison inmates to raise service dogs for wounded veterans and first responders, as well as explosive-detection canines for law enforcement. Puppies enter prison at the age of 8 weeks and live with their inmate puppy-raisers for approximately 24 months. As the puppies mature into well-loved, well-behaved dogs, their raisers learn what it means to contribute to society rather than take from it.

This newsletter was very, very proudly designed, printed, and mailed in New York City, supporting our local small businesses.