

**puppies  
behind  
bars**



To celebrate our 25th anniversary, Puppies Behind Bars (PBB) hosted an educational forum and reception at Gotham Hall in New York City on October 12. Gathered together were PBB staff, the Acting Commissioner of Corrections and Community Supervision for New York State, and a panel of four people who have personally benefitted from Puppies: US Air Force Colonel (retired) Jeanne Meyer; Heather O'Brien (formerly incarcerated and currently Director of Socialization for PBB); NYPD Detective Ron Thomas; and Tito Tyson (formerly incarcerated and currently Director of Volunteers for PBB). Cynthia McFadden, senior legal correspondent at NBC News, moderated the panel, which focused on how working directly with incarcerated "puppy-raisers" in maximum security prisons changed perceptions and brought disparate groups together for a common cause. Three hundred and twenty-five people gathered to hear the speakers and the panelists, to meet and thank the fifteen police officers who were present with their PBB dogs, to thank the veterans for their service to our country, and, in a great surprise, to see PBB presented with a book Commissioner Annucci had made specially for Puppies, with photos and quotes from incarcerated individuals in the correctional facilities in which we work.



# A Foundation of Hope

Remarks by Gloria Gilbert Stoga



For twenty-five years, Puppies Behind Bars has offered hope.

Hope to incarcerated individuals that they can turn their lives around through compassion, responsibility, hard work, and love.

Hope to members of bomb squads across the country that the PBB Lab by their side will find that explosive device before it detonates—and that there will never again be another Boston Marathon bombing.

Hope to Iraq and Afghanistan war vets that they can, once again, go shopping in a supermarket because turning from the produce aisle into dairy does not mean a sniper is lying in wait.

Hope to first responders for whom the almost daily task of responding to calls of domestic violence, child abuse, shootings, floodings, and horrific car accidents finally becomes too much and they feel they cannot go on.

Hope to police departments that officers with suicidal ideation will talk to a Lab and that same Lab will make other officers more accessible to communities wary of police.

For twenty-five years, Puppies Behind Bars dogs have been kissing, cajoling, healing, drying tears, listening to stories, creating smiles.

We could not do it without you.

To our volunteers, you are the bedrock of our organization. You go to prisons to get our dogs, or wait patiently on West 42nd Street for our shuttles to bring them to you. You teach them how to ride in cars and on city buses; you teach them how to wait in line at CVS; you teach them how to

lie quietly under a restaurant table.

To the Puppies Behind Bars board, thank you for your support.

To PBB staff, you're the best. You are smart, dedicated, compassionate, really fun to work with. I learn from you every day and I am grateful to you.

**“Puppies Behind Bars is many individuals, from very different walks of life, coming together to do right, in a world where many come together to do wrong.”**

To the Corrections Departments of New Jersey and New York, thank you. Commissioner Annucci, we would not be here today without your support.

To our donors, since we get no government funding, you, literally, make this all possible.

Tonight you will see and hear about our past twenty-five years. For our future, we want to double the number of incarcerated individuals with whom we work; we want to double the number of dogs we are raising; we want to double the number of clients we serve.

For at the end of the day, Puppies Behind Bars is many individuals, from very different walks of life, coming together to do right, in a world where many come together to do wrong.

# A Birdseye View of Puppies Behind Bars

Remarks by NYS DOCCS Acting Commissioner Anthony Annucci



Thank you and good evening. What a joyous occasion this is, celebrating 25 years that PBB has been an uplifting presence in our correctional facilities. Everyone knows how much respect, admiration and appreciation I personally have for both the work that this organization does and the incredible impact it has had: on the lives of incarcerated individuals, the Labradors that they train, and the recipients of the dogs, whether they are wounded warriors, first responders, police agencies, or law enforcement in need of bomb-sniffing canines.

Throughout the 25-year history of PBB within NYS DOCCS, I have witnessed this organization grow and evolve on so many different levels; and not just in terms of adjusting the training curriculum and fine-tuning the commands that the dogs must learn in order to best meet the needs of the intended recipients. But also, I saw them branch out to new clientele entirely, such as what is now taking place with many different police departments, including our very own NYPD. And since I am originally from Brooklyn, I will always have a special affection for New York's Finest.

Throughout the history of PBB, I too have learned many things. I learned from listening firsthand to accounts at graduations how incredibly debilitating PTSD can be for a person who has it. It is not just a condition where suddenly and unexpectedly a person may be reminded of something dreadful that they witnessed or experienced. Rather, it literally can transport that person back in time and place so that, for example, they may sincerely believe they are back on the

battlefield, facing what they think is a life and death confrontation with the enemy, when in fact they are actually standing in the parking lot of Walmart, and a stranger is approaching them to say something completely innocuous.

I also learned that people who have very debilitating invisible wounds are able to receive compassionate healing in the form of a Labrador that was trained by incarcerated individuals, which oftentimes cannot be matched by anything the medical community has to offer.

And of course, for the persons who train these dogs, and give something really meaningful back to society, they too experience their own form of healing. So, in effect what you have are two human beings from very different backgrounds, each in need of healing, and each able to receive healing through the conduit of a dog provided by this incredible program.

There is no question that at this moment in time, society sometimes seems to be unravelling before our very eyes. There is no end to the polarization, the recriminations, the vitriol, the distrust, and the cynicism that seem to pervade every aspect of our daily lives. Everyone seems to want to retreat safely to their respective corners, unwilling to even engage with those whom we distrust.

We are all familiar with the saying that any mule can kick a barn down, but only a carpenter can build one. Metaphorically speaking, what society desperately needs now are a lot more carpenters. Except, what we need for them to build are not barns, but bridges – bridges between

estranged groups and communities; and bridges to connect all of us with our shared humanity. Each of us has a choice to make. We can either be part of the problem, or, we can be part of the solution.

I am so proud of the fact that PBB has chosen to be a major part of the solution with their program and the bridges that

**“What you have are two human beings from very different backgrounds, each in need of healing, and each able to receive healing through the conduit of a dog provided by this incredible program.”**

they have built between incarcerated individuals and police officers. To see this process in action firsthand is truly remarkable—police officers coming to a correctional facility, learning under the tutelage of incarcerated individuals about the dogs they are receiving, and seeing the emotional bond that is created between the two, as evidenced by their moving speeches during a graduation. It is one of the most uplifting experiences one can witness. PBB is to be warmly congratulated for patiently persevering and ultimately enlisting the participation of many different police entities.

Now, it would not be an official PBB celebration if we did not also feature

at least one surprise. So, Deputy Commissioner Jeff McKoy, please come forward, and Gloria, please come forward, so that we can present a special gift to you on this the 25th anniversary of PBB. As you are opening it, I will explain it to the audience. It is an album of photographs and gratifying remarks by many different puppy-raisers, from each of the facilities where PBB works, starting with the first, Bedford Hills, and continuing up to and including the most recent additions of Eastern and Green Haven correctional facilities. We want this album to be a permanent reminder of the wonderful work you have done for 25 years.

Warmest congratulations again to PBB on this, your 25th anniversary.



# Finding My Angel

Remarks by Colonel Jeanne Meyer



*Colonel Jeanne Meyer, USAF, Ret., and her dog, Angel, graduated as a team on August 15, 2019, in a ceremony at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. Other military veterans and first responders with their service dogs were on the stage with Meyer that night. She gave the following address, which has been slightly adapted for print.*

My name is Jeanne Meyer. I retired from the United States Air Force three weeks ago, after 25 plus years of service as a Judge Advocate.

Collectively those of us graduating today wear or have worn eight different uniforms, held countless positions of responsibility, been entrusted with the lives of thousands, lived and worked around the world, and worked for agencies and departments at the county, city, state, and national level. We met for the first time ten days ago. What we have in common is that we all made the choice to serve others.

We also share a history of trauma, some of us experiencing trauma, some helping others through their trauma. For those of us who have experienced trauma, we also have in common the near-paralyzing inability to ask for help. To say the words “I can’t do this by myself anymore.” To reach the point of darkness where you feel like anything—anything—would be better than waking up again the next morning. Helpers aren’t supposed to need or ask for help. We have that in common.

I suffered my first trauma while deployed to Afghanistan in 2002, when I was sexually assaulted by allied soldiers. I told no one

and did nothing about it. In my mind, I packed it all up in a box, wrapped and sealed it tight with duct tape, and shoved it into a closet in the back. And then I kept going and continued to do my job.

Seven years later, early on in my tour in Iraq, a barrage of rockets landed around my housing unit, destroying a nearby unit, scattering pieces of the occupants and their belongings everywhere. I walked through that to get to work the next day, so I could

**“The puppy-raisers—quite simply, they have given me my life back. And for that I will be eternally grateful.”**

keep going and continue to do my job.

The rocket attacks were continuous and seemingly unending. On New Year’s Eve, 2010, we endured round after round after round of attacks. By the end of January I had lost ten pounds, could only sleep an hour or two every night, and startled at every noise. My commander finally directed me to get help, so I got a prescription for anti-anxiety medication, kept going, and continued to do my job until I re-deployed home in June.

After I returned from Iraq, I bounced from therapist to therapist until 2014, when the Air Force sent me to an Air Force psychologist specializing in trauma. He was the first person I told about my traumatic experience in Afghanistan. He used that information to repeat my sexual

assaults in the name of treatment. I told no one and did nothing about it. I packed it all up in a box in my mind, which I wrapped in rolls and rolls and rolls of duct tape to seal it up tight and locked in the closet with the other trauma. I never intended to open that box in my life. I kept going and continued to do my job.

Two years ago, in September 2017, my new therapist told me that that psychologist had been arrested and charged with sexually assaulting other airmen in treatment for trauma. I shattered into a million pieces. The guilt I felt, and still feel deeply to this day, for not having come forward in 2014 and preventing him from having access to and assaulting those airmen was my undoing. I couldn't leave that box sealed up in the closet. I had to come forward to help those airmen, even though I knew it would end my career. Once I opened that closet door, 17 years of trauma exploded out. I couldn't go on, and for the first time I had to say "I can't do my job."

Everyone up here has either reached that point or helped others that have. What we didn't know was that at the same time we were going under, the amazing team that is PBB was building our lifeboats.

Two years ago, in September 2017, when my life imploded and my trauma broke me, halfway across the country, Angel was born. And as I struggled to breathe every day, the puppy-raisers in PBB labored every day to train her, care for her, and love her.

As we struggled, they prepared to throw us our lifelines.

As we started to sink, they were teaching our rescuers how to pull us back to shore.

As we wondered how we were going to get through the next 24 hours, they were planning our futures with our new partners.

For nearly 17 years, I woke up most mornings dreading the day ahead. For the past two years—as I prepared to testify, through the trial and the sentencing, despite outpatient treatment, inpatient treatment, and the best efforts of some amazing therapists—most nights I hoped I wouldn't wake up the next day.

I met Angel ten days ago. Three days later, the sentencing hearing was final. As the puppy-raisers know, Angel does not simply open her eyes and wake up. She explodes awake, wagging her whole body, making happy grunts and noises, and is simply happy to awaken to a new day of possibilities. She is so excited to get going she can barely contain herself.

It's been ten days since I met her, and I now wake up with her, often nose to nose, starting to feel the same way. I know that no matter what happens that day, my Angel will be by my side and watching my back.

That is a gift that I can never repay. No words exist to tell everyone at PBB what they have given to me in the form of Angel.

The puppy-raisers—quite simply, they have given me my life back. And for that I will be eternally grateful.

I have no doubt that I speak for everyone up here when I say that they have changed the course of our lives in a way we never thought possible. A piece of each of them who raised these puppies will always be with us in our puppies and in our hearts. Thank you.





# A Mission of Healing

Officer Heather McClelland,  
Groton, Connecticut Police Department



On Wednesday, October 12, 2022, two Bristol (CT) police officers were killed in an ambush-style attack while a third officer was seriously injured by gunfire. This tragic event left the Bristol PD, the Bristol community and the entire state of Connecticut in a state of shock and devastation. Over the next few weeks, twelve teams of Puppies Behind Bars facility dogs traveled to Bristol to comfort the officers and staff of the police department. We sat on the floor in the records department and let our dogs “tell a story” to anyone who needed it. Officers held our pups, scratched their bellies, and shared stories of their fallen friends. We spent time with the families at their homes. We comforted grieving friends and co-workers as they paid their respects at the wakes and funeral. These two men

had touched so many lives, it was almost impossible to comprehend their impact.

Nothing could have prepared us for this tragedy—no training, no experience, no schooling. But somehow our dogs were there and they knew exactly what they needed to do. And while our dogs were there for everyone else, they were there for us too, their handlers. Oftentimes in this profession we forget to take a breath or step away to take care of our own well-being. Thankfully we are blessed to have

“Nothing could have prepared us for this tragedy—no training, no experience, no schooling. But somehow our dogs were there and they knew exactly what they needed to do.”

these amazing dogs who can sense our stress and emotion and take care of us as well. While we never want to experience these tragedies and loss of life, we are so lucky and grateful to have these dogs help us help others get through.

We will continue to be there for the days, weeks and months to come. Our commitment to the Bristol PD and their community is long-term. After seeing the impact our dogs have had on everyone affected by this tragedy, it only motivates us to do more.



## OUR MISSION

Puppies Behind Bars trains incarcerated individuals to raise service dogs for wounded war veterans and first responders, facility dogs for police departments, and explosive-detection canines for law enforcement. Puppies enter prison at the age of 8 weeks and live with their incarcerated 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.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Erin Briggs  
*Managing Director,  
Goldman Sachs*

Lori S. Gevalt  
*(in memoriam)*

Jim Hodges  
*Artist*

Joan LaCaille  
*(in memoriam)*

Alan Lawrence  
*Partner, Cadwalader,  
Wickersham & Taft LLP*

Daniel Lobitz, CHAIRMAN  
*Partner, Robert A.M. Stern Architects*

Kathleen Mara

Elise O'Shaughnessy

Amy R. Pasquariello

Diana Rhoten, SECRETARY

Gloria Gilbert Stoga  
*President & Founder,  
Puppies Behind Bars*

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

All the puppies in our program are named by generous supporters who donate \$6,000 or more to PBB to become a sponsor. The honorary sponsorship entitles the donor to name a puppy, and to receive quarterly updates, with photos, written by the incarcerated puppy-raiser, and sent from PBB's office. These "sponsor letters" offer a unique insight into the love and care that are invested in all our dogs, and into the training and career path of a particular pup. If you're interested in the program, please contact Eric Barsness at [eric@puppiesbehindbars.com](mailto:eric@puppiesbehindbars.com), or use the enclosed envelope to send in your sponsorship donation. It's a gift that keeps on giving for several years!

**PUPPIES BEHIND BARS** 263 W. 38TH ST., 4TH FL., NEW YORK, NY 10018  
TAX ID #13-3969389 CFC #11902 PHONE: 212 680 9562 [WWW.PUPPIESBEHINDBARS.COM](http://WWW.PUPPIESBEHINDBARS.COM)

WATCH THE SHORT VIDEO WE MADE SHOWING OUR 25 YEARS OF WORK:  
[WWW.PUPPIESBEHINDBARS.COM](http://WWW.PUPPIESBEHINDBARS.COM)

PHOTO CREDITS: MATTHEW CARASELLA PHOTOGRAPHY, ASHLEY GILBERTSON,  
HEATHER MCCLELLAND, AVA PELLOR, VALERIE SHAFF, PEGGY VANCE