

Arizona Department of Veterans' Service Advisory Commission
4141 North S. Herrera Way, Phoenix, AZ 85012

November 10, 2016

MINUTES

Advisory Commissioners Present

Jill Nelson
Joseph Brophy
Danielle Desmond
Peter Kloeber
Arlthe Rios
Brett Rustand (via telephone)
Rebecca Villalpando

Advisory Commissioners Absent

Ryan Peters
Ronald Perkins

AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)

Tera Scherer, Executive Assistant

Invited Guests

Chris Norton, Director, Phoenix VA Regional
Benefit Office
Sergio Chao, Assistant Director, Phoenix VA
Regional Benefit Office

Call to Order – Vice Chairwoman Jill Nelson called the meeting to order at 9:58 a.m.

Commissioner Nelson made a presentation to the Commission of a non-profit organization, Soldier's Best Friend. Soldier's Best Friend provides U.S. military veterans living with combat-related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injury with service or therapeutic companion dogs, most of which are rescued from local shelters. The veteran and dog train together to build a trusting relationship that saves two lives at once and inspires countless others. See the presentation [here](#).

The Commission welcomed guests Chris Norton, Director of the VA Regional Benefits Office in Phoenix and Sergio Chao, Assistant Director. Mr. Chao briefed the Advisory Commission. Highlights include the benefits line Phoenix call center has increased the total number of agents from 105 to 227 this year. Additionally, 27,000 veteran claims have been completed in the last year. The average number of days to complete a claim is 123 days, down from 335 days from three years ago.

Open Discussion for the Good of the Order

Commissioner Villalpando stated that Black Canyon City has an itinerate VBC in place one time a month to service that community's veterans.

Commissioner Kloeber stated that the Coconino County Veterans Forum meets quarterly in the Flagstaff area. The meeting is very well received by local veteran service organizations and continues to grow in size with every meeting.

Approval of Meeting Minutes – Vice Chair Nelson called for the approval of the September 8, 2016 Veterans Advisory Commission Meeting Minutes. There being no changes to the minutes Commissioner Rios moved to approve the minutes as written. Commissioner Villalpando seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 1103 a.m. The next Advisory Commission meeting will be held January 12, 2017.



SOLDIER'S BEST ★ FRIEND

www.Soldiersbestfriend.org

623.218.6486

Soldier's Best Friend

OUR MISSION

- Soldier's Best Friend provides U.S. military veterans living with combat-related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) with Service or Therapeutic Companion Dogs, most of which are rescued from local shelters. The veteran and dog train together to build a trusting relationship that saves two lives at once and inspires countless others

OUR GOAL

- To help our war heroes improve in their symptoms of PTSD, adjust back into civilian life, lead a more productive life and help them build self esteem. We also want to help the pet overpopulation problem by helping place shelter or rescue dogs into good homes.

About SBF

- Founded in 2011
- Arizona-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit charity
- Small administrative office in Peoria
- Training in
 - Phoenix
 - Flagstaff
 - Prescott
 - Tucson
 - Sierra Vista



What Makes SBF Unique

- Focused exclusively on combat-related PTSD or TBI
- Acquire all our dogs from shelters –helping with animal overpopulation
 - We do not use breeders or accept dog donations
- We use owner-trainer model. The veteran lives and trains with their dog from the beginning
- Program is at **NO COST** to the veteran, and includes low to no cost veterinary services. Program costs SBF approximately \$4,000 per dog

ADA Laws

What is a Service Dog?

- Service Animal: Dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability.
- Work/Tasks must be directly related to disability.
- Not required to be 'certified,' professionally trained, or to wear a vest or identifying material
- Emotional Support, Therapy, Comfort, and Companion Animals are not service animals.

ADA Laws

Service Dogs Identification

- You MAY ask:

Is this dog a service dog required because of a disability?

What work or task has this dog been trained to perform?

- You MAY NOT ask:

for the dog to demonstrate tasks

for documentation

the nature of the disability



ADA & Arizona Laws

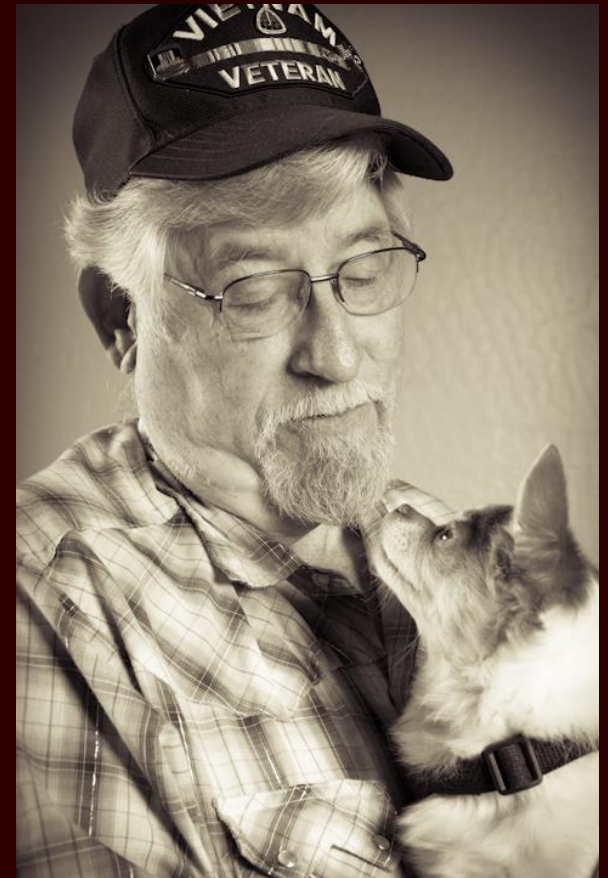
Service Dogs Rights

- Service dogs are given privileges to accompany owner in most places including hospitals, hotels, restaurants, and ambulances
- Privileges may be revoked at establishment if handler is not in control of dog
- The ADA does not cover churches, commercial airlines, or federal agencies

Air Carrier Access Act- allows for service animals and emotional support animals

Symptoms of PTSD & TBI

- Irritability with Friends and Family
- Inability to concentrate
- Startle Response to sudden noises
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Depression
- Anxiety/ Crowd Anxiety



Symptoms of PTSD & TBI

- Panic Attacks
- Suicidal Thoughts
- Reclusive Behavior
- Memory Loss
- Balance Issues



- Can impact relationships with friends and family, ability to keep a job and quality of life

What are PTSD and TBI Service Dog tasks?

- Provide gentle physical barrier between veteran and other people so they can comfortably interact
- Enter the room before the veteran to let him know if someone is there
- Alert the veteran to someone approaching
- Provide tactile distraction to disrupt symptoms during anxiety attacks, flashbacks, nightmare
- Turn on the lights after a nightmare or before the veteran enters a room

What are PTSD and TBI Service Dog tasks?

- Remind veteran to take medication at specific time
- Provide support or brace when veteran is standing up or sitting down
- Pick up or retrieve an object
- Help stabilize for balance
- Wake from nightmares
- Bonus: Love & Comfort



How SBF Works

Selecting Our Dogs

- Veterans may have their own dog evaluated for program
- What we look for in a dog
 - Between 1-3 year old
 - Good temperament – no aggression
 - Ability to learn/take instruction



Selecting Our Dogs

- Start with Veteran in-home interview
 - Are there children
 - What is the space like (big dog/little)
 - Does the veteran have special needs (bracing, etc)
- Reach out to shelter/rescue partners
 - Fetch Foundation, Arizona Humane Society, Yavapai Humane Society
- Identify, evaluate, and adopt
 - Between 1-3 year old
 - Good temperament – no aggression
 - Ability to learn/take instruction

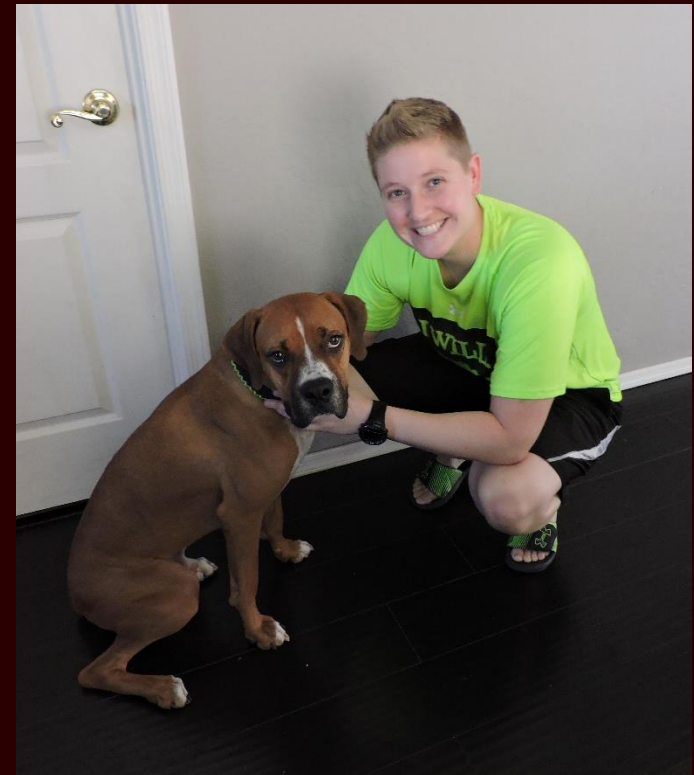
Selecting Our Dogs

- Fostering & Evaluate
 - Volunteers foster dog for between 2-5 weeks
 - Any dogs that 'wash out' will be taken back by shelter
- Meet & Greet with veteran
 - Once paired, dog lives with veteran
- Begin training (within 1-2 weeks)



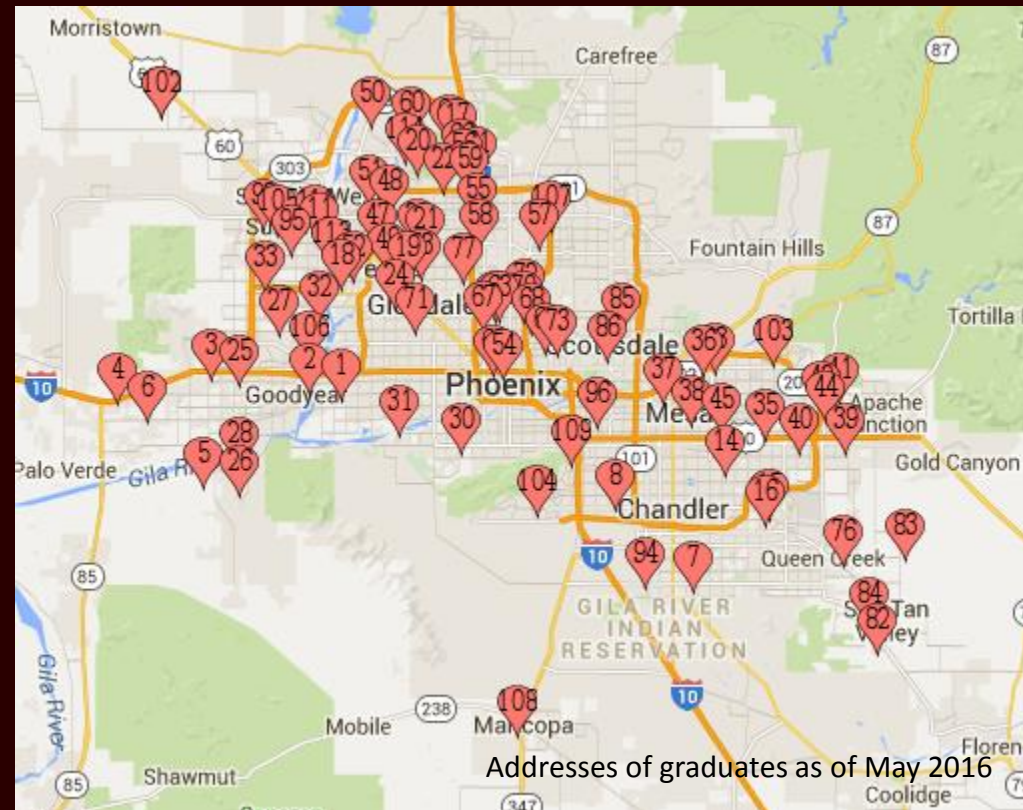
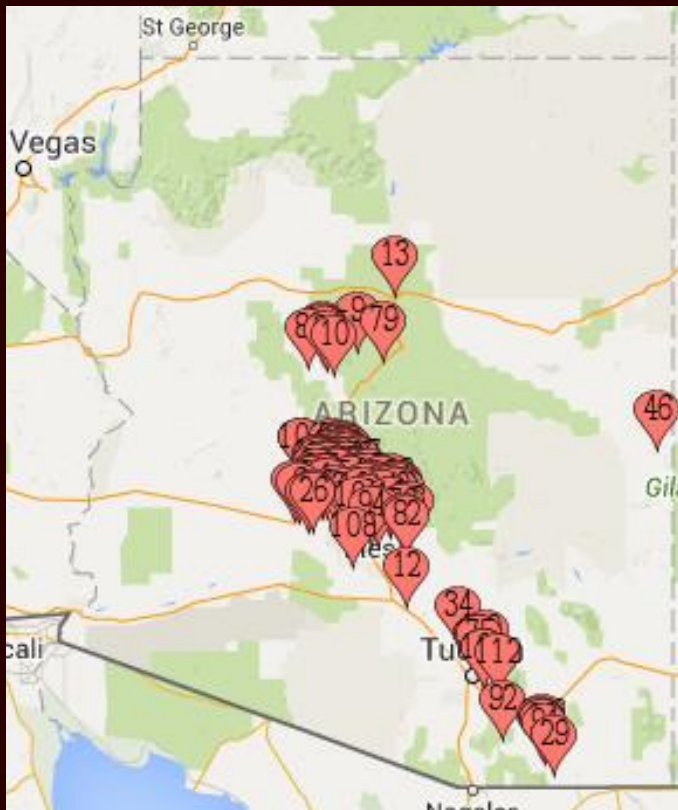
Training

- The veteran and their dog train for 6-9 months
 - 1-2x per week with a professional trainer
 - 'Homework' in between
- Training and Testing include:
 - AKC Canine Good Citizen Test
 - Required Outings
 - Airport & boarding plane
 - Restaurants, stores, hair salon
 - Mass transit
 - and More
 - PAT (Physical Access Test)
 - Written husbandry exam



Training

- We train throughout Arizona in Flagstaff, Prescott, Tucson, Sierra Vista, and throughout the valley



Training Center

- We are currently in the process of constructing a 4,600 sq ft training center in Peoria that will allow us to expand our hours and impact!



Training Center

- Every dollar donated to the training center construction between now and September 15th will be matched up to \$250,000 by the Dorrance Family Foundation



SBF Statistics



Since May 2011:

290 Applicants have been accepted into the program*

42 Teams currently in training

133 Teams have graduated.

100+ Dogs rescued from local shelters

*Not all veterans complete the program.

Testimonials

Cooper has provided me a companionship beyond what I expected. We are very close and Cooper helps me with my symptoms of PTSD, depression, and anxiety. It has been a relief that Cooper wakes me from nightmares and comforts me. He has helped me to get out and be more social. **Having Cooper gives me hope and helps me to heal.**

- Sarah & Cooper



Testimonials

Quote



[Training has] been a rewarding experience, and I've since learned a lot about being patient, not only with my dog Louie, but with myself. Having Louie has helped me to cope with my anxiety, frustration, nightmares, and irritability with people.

- Mike & Louie

Testimonials

“My experience with Soldier’s Best Friend and training my service dog has been life changing. Coping with civilian life has become more manageable. Things most people take for granted, like going to the local Target store, have been extremely difficult for me. I would often wait until late at night. I still clear roof-tops and remain hypervigilant, but having a service animal helps take some of the distress away. I often imagine how simple life is for my buddy Wilfred...it keeps it all in perspective. When things get to be too much, my buddy is there. From the restless nights to the difficult situations, I have something that has been an elusive possibility...I have hope again. I consider myself fortunate to have had this opportunity. Some days are better than others, but having this service animal over the past few months has given me both an outlet for coping and restored much of my confidence. Thanks Soldier’s Best Friend and the generous donors who made this all possible.”



- Rick & Wilfred

Testimonials

Quote



Since introducing Lily into my life, I no longer dwell on the thought of ending my life.

- Jim & Lily