

# New Horizons Service Dogs

CHANGING LIVES FOREVER

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A full-grown trained Golden Retriever



The training starts when they are puppies

One of the greatest things that service dogs provide for their disabled, human companions is an opportunity to live a relatively normal life in spite of the mobility problems that they face. There is something truly remarkable about the relationships that develop between disabled people and the canine caretakers that enhance their lives. Founded by Janet Severt, a quadriplegic who uses a service dog herself, New Horizons Service Dogs (NHSD) is a non-profit organization that recognizes the value of these extraordinary relationships and helps to facilitate them by partnering trained dogs with disabled handlers in need.

NHSD is a Florida based organization that trains Golden and Labrador Retrievers to perform tasks that will make their handler's life easier. Some of these tasks include things like opening doors, retrieving objects, turning off light switches and pulling a wheelchair. Once the dogs have successfully completed NHSD's training program, they are given to disabled individuals throughout the state at no cost. Depending on factors related to their temperament and abilities, service dogs are trained to

“The inmates work with the puppies on everything from basic housetraining to teaching them more complex behaviors like how to navigate around a wheelchair.

work either in private homes or in places like adult living facilities and nursing homes.

The training for future service dogs, which generally takes about 18 months, is provided by volunteers known as weekend puppy raisers and also by prison inmates who participate in a special program that was developed in collaboration with the Florida Department of Corrections. Qualified NHSD instructors provide both the volunteers and the inmates with instruction on how to properly train the puppies. The inmates work with the puppies on everything from basic housetraining to teaching them more complex behaviors like how to navigate around a wheelchair. Weekend puppy raisers, on the other hand, focus on socializing the puppies by introducing them to public places like grocery stores, shopping malls, doctor's offices and other places to which the dogs will eventually accompany their disabled handlers.

*NHSD is always looking for more weekend puppy raisers and other volunteers that can help by transporting puppies to vet visits and other necessary trips. To learn more about how you can get involved, please visit the NHSD website at <http://www.newhorizonsservicedogs.org> or call the NHSD office at (386) 456-0408.*

## DEBBIE AND SAGO, A BREATHTAKING CANINE SUCCESS STORY

Ten years ago I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. A couple of years later I applied for a Mobility Assistance dog at New Horizons. I was amazed when they told me that there was a 3-year waiting list for a dog. Finally, one day, I got a call; they had a dog for me! I was so excited I couldn't sleep. The next step was to go to New Horizons for training. When I arrived I was shown three dogs, but I knew immediately that the very strong male dog named Sago was the best fit for me.

The training was very tough, sort of like dog boot camp. There are about 60 commands that you, as the dogs' partner, must learn. After successfully completing training, I was sent home with Sago.

Sago has changed my entire life; before, I was in my scooter chair almost 85% of the time, now I can go for short walks with him. He retrieves things for me and holds my heavy bags. If I find myself on the floor and no one is around, I call for Sago, he braces like a statue and I can use his body to propel me off the floor. These were all things that I needed my husband or my son to do, but not any more, I am INDEPENDENT again! Sago and I are partners in every way; he is my very personal friend, who loves me unconditionally as I do him.

The world is a tough place for a disabled person and a service dog. People still don't understand what these dogs do, they always think that I am blind because of course, guide dogs are really the only dogs that people know. Many times we go to places and people shout for us to leave, then I have to tell them that he is my service dog, even though he is always wearing his harness that says so. I then stand my ground in hopes that Sago and I forge new ground for future service dog

teams. New Horizons is an amazing organization and I hope they can continue to bring independence back to many more people in the future.



Debbie and Sago



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