

# THE FOUR-PAWS BULLETIN-PVSP

New Life K9's Newsletter-Pleasant Valley State Prison/  
D-Facility



The buzz was definitely real, for months the talk about actually getting “dogs” here on the facility was all that many of us here at Pleasant Valley State Prison could talk about. New Life K9's Program came here into the Institution just a few dogs at a time; however, when they finally began to arrive everyone embraced these furry little creatures as if they had never experienced such joy in prison whatsoever. Actually, that concept was truer than you may think; for the majority of prisoners here on D-Facility there are “Lifers” that have been incarcerated for well over twenty and thirty years. So, the harsh reality is that they have gone that long without having touched a dog whatsoever. This can be an overwhelming experience for any human being that reaches a point in their incarceration where they have felt as if they had lost their connection with humanity when they came into this environment. Grown men sat out in the grass, the dayrooms and smiled as if they had just received their freedom-and perhaps in a way they had.

The motto of New Life K9's is simple, “Saving Lives Through the Healing Power of The Human Canine-Bond.” The method used at New Life K9's is one that may not be as traditional as many of us are used to, however, I think it is one that makes perfect sense to anyone that has a better perception of the canine and their relationship to man than old traditions once carried. Building a “Bond” is the key to establishing a *trusting relationship* with your dog, and that is why the “Bond-Based” method is something that is necessary, especially where future service dogs are concerned.

In two years, these dogs will be placed with a Veteran or First responder out in the community that is suffering from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Until then, they will spend the next two years learning how to think for themselves, make cognitive decisions based on being in certain situations aimed at enhancing their capabilities, and their confidence will be the driving force to their wanting to do for others what they cannot do for themselves. That in itself is a powerful vision of what is to come for these precious creatures, no matter where it is that you are witnessing it from (*prison or not*).

*“Saving Lives through the Healing Power of the Human Canine-Bond”*

## *Inside this issue:*

|                                    |       |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| December's Birthday Boys.....      | Pg-3  |
| In A Dog's World (Q & A) .....     | Pg-4  |
| Operation Gratitude Event.....     | Pg-5  |
| What is Bond-Based all about?..... | Pg-7  |
| Puppy's love-lasting impact.....   | Pg-8  |
| From heart of a Puppy Raiser.....  | Pg-9  |
| Express Yourself (Art).....        | Pg-12 |
| Outside Looking In.....            | Pg-13 |
| Book Report of the Month.....      | Pg-14 |
| Love That Only He Could give.....  | Pg-15 |
| FINN: Final Addition to NLK9.....  | Pg-16 |
| Bits & Pieces (Pictures).....      | Pg-17 |
| The Dominance Theory.....          | Pg-18 |
| One on One Interview.....          | Pg-19 |

*“Love your dog today as if tomorrow is not promised.”*

## From the Four-Paws Bulletin Team ✍️

**W**e are very honored to take on the roles as The Four-Paws Bulletin Newsletter Team here on D-Facility. Our mission is simple; to bring to the population a better understanding of the New Life K9's Program and the impact that it is having on the lives of the men that have committed the next two years of their lives while incarcerated into helping change lives. Earlier this year we were blessed with precious dogs and since then they have definitely changed the atmosphere here on the yard with their presence.

For those of you that are not fully aware of what the New life K9's program is all about; Our dogs are going to spend the next two years upon their arrival dates here on the facility learning everything that they will need to know in order to fulfill their roles as Service Dogs out in the community. The dogs will be placed with their lifelong recipients whom are suffering from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) out in the community, whom are particularly First Responders and Military Veterans that are in need of a lifeline.

**“Every day twenty-two veterans and First Responders are losing their battles with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and taking their own lives.”**

The mission of New Life K9's is: “Saving Lives through the Healing Power of The Human-Canine Bond”. That is exactly what we are collectively doing here, helping saving lives while in the process learning how to restore our *own lives*.

Not only will you read personal accounts of the men (handlers) involved in the program, but you will also get to experience the continued impact that these dogs are having on everyone's lives that come into contact with them. Men have taken on roles for various reasons, but at the end of the day it comes down to everyone wanting to feel *human* again by giving the best of themselves despite the past mistakes we have all made. So, if you see us walking the yard with our dogs please come and ask to pet/spend some time with them; having a hard day here in prison can easily be put back into perspective once you have sat down with one of these beautiful creatures and are reminded of the *good* that can still be found while in here.



*THE FOUR-PAWS BULLETIN TEAM-PVSP-D-FACILITY*

**Newsletter Team:** Keith Erickson, Derek Romero, Ernesto Sanchez, John Demery and Ernie Serrano



# Decembers Birthday Boys

**Zach, Nelson and Carson**

Earlier in the year Carson, Nelson and Zack were the first of our dogs to be brought into the prison launching the New Life K9's Program. These amazing Golden Retrievers have their own unique personalities and you can easily identify them across the yard once you have spent enough time with them, not to mention the fact that they are different from each other in a lot of their own ways.

**Zach** is the brother of the three that came to us as the "little Brother" unsure of his surroundings. But before long he grew confident and now loves to speak his mind when he wants something or simply wants you to know that he is there to receive your attention by his *bark*.

Then, we have **Nelson** who seems to be the brother that likes to play in gopher holes, toss dirt in the air during his digging & hunting expeditions, and when you ask his handlers about him they will say that he is a very smart dog that has no problem learning things, but wants to do things at his own pace. He loves to pull ropes and get in your face until you pay attention to him like a small boy would do. One thing that is very important when you get to know Nelson is that he is the dog that always wants to feel your presence next to him. A lot of people misunderstand Nelson because they think he is acting up when he is simply just one of those dogs that wants to be at your side all the time. In time, his handlers say, he will learn that it is going to be O.K. to be on his own and experience the world as he needs to.

**Carson** is no longer here with us, but we still want to share with you a bit about our missed canine friend. He is definitely full of energy and loves to run around and play. When we asked his handlers what they had to say about him, they said that he was definitely a big kid that loved attention, especially belly rubs when you approached him at any time. The truth is, Carson had a personality that was bigger than life, and watching him leave was hard on everyone. *We love and miss you buddy!*



**Richard & His "Silly Boy" Zach.....**



**Chad & Nelson having a laugh.....**



**Jason & Carson together again one last time....**

## IN A DOG'S WORLD WITH "PAW-FESSOR KOA"

Have you ever wondered what goes on in the mind of a dog, yes, even when they are sleeping? Well, just ask NLK9's "Paw-Fessor Koa" and I'm sure you will be surprised at what he has to share with all of us....

A "Q & A" With The dog that knows the answers to all of your questions.



Do you have any questions regarding your dog's behavior? If so, please contact your Four-Paws Bulletin Newsletter Team and "Paw-Fessor Koa" who are always eager to help you with your concerns.

**Q:** My dog always jumps on people when they greet her out in public places. This has become such a big problem that my wife and I avoid taking her places now. She is one year old now and we feel like it is too late to change this kind of behavior. Is it too late?

**A:** Coming from a dog that knows all about a dog's behavior, it is never too late to teach one of us good manners out in public. The key is simple: First, you must get to know what goes on in a dog's head that makes him or her do what they do. As a dog myself, I know what it is like to be on all four legs wanting attention from our human friends. They are much higher than we are, and let's face it we want so badly to be up there with you kissing and licking your face. Affection is something that we truly enjoy, and believe me we never mean to invade your personal space. If you can take a minute to put yourself in my shoes...or should I say my paws, you may understand. See, when we meet a stranger the first thing that we want to do is get at their level (eyes) and say "hello" just as a human would do to another one. So, if we are doing something inappropriate it is up to you as our human companions, much our parents, to teach us what is and is not appropriate out in public. If you stay consistent and patient with us you will be quite surprised at how fast we start to pick things up that we are being taught from you.

I would suggest that you do this with your dog: When you are out in public and you know that you are about to be approached by a stranger, it is your duty as the *Parent* to anticipate how your dog is going to react. Use what we call the "*Two hands all in method*" where you get down at your dog's level and rub/massage her/chest, or perhaps food share with her so that you are getting her attention primarily focused on you instead of the excitement of the stranger that is approaching you. Talk to your dog in a calming and soothing voice so that she knows that it is time to *relax* and not be so hyped up. Believe me, once you have your dog's attention you will realize just how much easier it is to communicate with your dog and not feel like you are completely helpless and out of control where your dog's behavior is concerned. The key to this is that you are addressing these behaviors *before* they can start to formulate into patterns. Us dog's do things by patterning, meaning that we are much like humans in the ways that we behave by what we are accustomed to doing (*habits*).

Well, I hope that I have helped you with your question/concern about your dog. If you ever need the help of "Paw-Fessor Koa" again, just give me a shake or two from my nap and I will be here to shed some light on what goes on in a dog's world. *Roof! Roof! Roof!*



# Operation Gratitude:

## PVSP- NLK9's Handlers setting out to make a Difference

By: Keith Erickson

What better way to restore one's own humanity than being of service to others. Our Veterans and First Responders in our communities need more than just our welcoming arms once they have returned from deployment or saved a life. They need a constant reminder that what they do each and every day is beyond just *extraordinary*. The fact that they have made the conscious decision to place their own lives into harm's way for the sake of protecting you and me, perfect strangers, says a lot about the character of such human beings. So, we as NLK9's handlers here at PVSP set out to do something for them in January that pays recognition to what their bravery means to us all.

"Operation Gratitude" was a two day even here at Pleasant Valley State Prison that started with a very emotional and personal ceremony held in the gymnasium here on D-Facility. Opening ceremony consisted of *The Pledge of Allegiance*, followed by NLK9 representatives taking the podium and sharing their own stories about serving our country. The hardest things (as we all sat in the audience witnessing) is that you never forget how the trauma that putting your life on the line affects you so many years after it has taken place. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is something that steals so much from a human being, even when the rest of the world has no idea what the person is going through from day to day.



"Land of the free because of the brave"....



Richard & Zach painting cards for all of our heroes



Finn & Zach taking a break from the day's events to play with one another, while their handlers stay at it drawing & writing letters to our Deployed Troops, First Responders and Veterans out in the communities that have continued to sacrifice so much for us and our families.

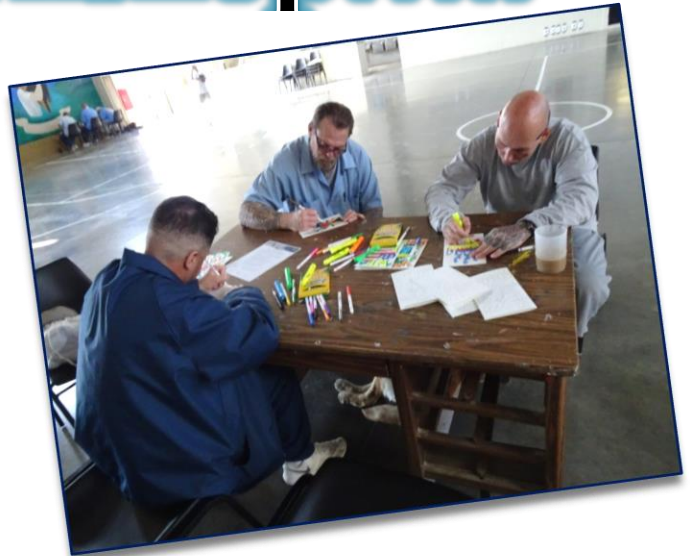


# Operation Gratitude Day

## Two Workshop.....



*Frankie & Ernesto putting their skills to work.....*



*Thor, Keith & Durango spending time telling our brave ones how much we care.....*



*Jason & Chad writing heartfelt letters to those who have sacrificed so much....*



*Handsome "Delta" giving us his "Hello There Folks" look.....*

**"A Day of Remembering Those  
Who Have Sacrificed So Much"**

# What is the NLK9's Bond-Based Method All About?

By: Ernie Serrano

What is Bond-Based Teaching? I am first to admit that whatever our thoughts, understandings, experiences, and exposures to canines and the instructing process, or training that we once thought we had full possession of, well, we had to throw it out the window when we signed up for this program right away. Remaining vigilant to the fluidity of Bond-Based Teaching is still a part of the process we are all learning from day to day.

What does remaining vigilant to the fluidity of Bond-Based Teaching consist of? I think this can be best captured in the WELCOME portion of the NLK-9's guide "While in pursuit of a bond-beyond measure". [The New Life K-9's Prison Pup Program], which states in part..."There are very few black and white answers, rather there is a field of grey from which you will learn how to use creativity, intuition, and experience, because much like us as individuals; every dog is different. Knowing this, you will learn how to apply our philosophy and methodology to any circumstance, context, or individual dog personality. Understanding this information will help guide you in every aspect of the handling and proper planning of teachings, playing, field trips, and socialization with your dog."

When taking time to teach and help the canine develop, we have to do it with the mind to guide, direct in proper behavior, encourage cognitive challenges, etc. as if we were helping raise a child between the ages of 2-5 years of age. I have come to understand that everything we do with our canine partner has to be through a mutually beneficial partnership; this is a concept that we have been introduced to in the material that we were handed in the orientation & testing process of the program. However, it wasn't until we began practicing the concept that we began ingesting the methodology. Anything short of this mind set will always leave room for the person teaching the canine to make mistakes, but, most importantly, fall short in the love required to keep your little partner's needs before your own discomforts, inconveniences and/or desires.

I know that to mention the word "love" in this form can be met with some resistance, but this is exactly what we are to exercise if we want to succeed in our part of the process. Why is it critical? When we love someone or something, we want to shower the object of our affection with our best or expect the best in return. This is what keeps us aware of our canine and his/her needs.

We use the term "Staying on the phone" with our canine; some have interpreted the term to mean just paying attention and talking to them as we walk with them on the leash. Though they may be somewhat correct, it is more than just that. It also includes knowing your dog's personality, knowing his movements, knowing his particular sounds (yelping, barking, moans and grunts) during situations and circumstances. However, it also means that you are required to put his needs before yours especially during these crucial developmental and adjusting stages of his/her growth. For example, if your particular canine is taking his/her time walking because they just woke up, you should exercise patience with them and not pick them up by getting from point A to point B. Another example that can be given, is knowing when to say "no" to others that want to approach your dog when he/she is working (specifically when they are wearing their vest), This happens often and interferes with the educating and development of your dog.

**Bonding is the foundation upon which the partnership with your service dog is based**-The definition of bonding is defined as "a mutually beneficial and dynamic partnership between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors that are essential to the health and well-being of both". We are provided with the material that highlights some of the requirements that we have to meet in order to measure our behavior, as is depicted in the following:

(Continued on Pg-10)



# A Puppy's Love-Lasting Impact

By: Frankie Luzano

I have been incarcerated for the past twenty-four years; this means that I had not even touched a dog since I was arrested for the crime that I am in prison for. The New Life K9's program has had a huge impact on my life and those around me that get to experience the company of the dogs even outside of the team. I learned right away that this program stood for something that was much bigger than just me, and something that I had never experienced behind the walls of prison. So, it was very hard to resist being humbled right away and feeling like I was immediately changing. Being a dog handler gets you a lot of attention on the yard, sometimes it is something that takes a minute to get used to, but, for the most part inmates and staff walk up to the dogs daily just to experience their presence on the yard and you start to appreciate that.

My puppy is a light brown Labradoodle named "Jimmy" and he has a personality of what I refer to as a "softie" because he came in to the facility more timid than the other dogs around him and reminds me of a "mama's boy" (*that is not a bad thing of course-grins*). He also reminded me of a little "Chewbacca" from the Steven Spielberg movies "Star Wars" that I grew up watching as a kid. The most memorable moment for me so far with Jimmy is when someone that I did not know came up to pet jimmy and spend

Some time with him on the yard. Later on, that inmate came up to me and explained to me how grateful he was that he was able to pet Jimmy and feel human again. He had just got some bad news about a family member passing away and felt like he just wanted to act out in a way that would only get him into more trouble in the long run. He said that he still hurts about losing his loved one, but at least Jimmy was there to remind him that there are still *good things in the world* even if he is locked up. I thought that was pretty cool that just a moment with Jimmy could leave such a love-lasting impact on his heart enough to make him think about what he was experiencing emotionally.

I think that dogs have a way of making people feel *normalcy* when they are going through tough times or experiencing things that their minds cannot make sense of without being comforted & not asked questions about what they are feeling. We as handlers are learning everyday how to understand our own emotions and feelings ourselves, and that is never easy for someone that has gone through lot of hard times in their lives and struggles with trusting in others around them. I myself am learning how to trust; trusting in the process of changing from the inside out seems to come easier with the dogs in our care because it feels unconditional, and I believe that we *all* need that to succeed in life period.

**"We as Handlers are learning everyday how to understand the emotions and feelings that we experience ourselves"...**





## **From the Heart of a Puppy Raiser:**

*"How being a Puppy Raiser has affected my life".....(Puppy Raiser "Liz" of Team Delta)*

### **How do you feel about being a Puppy Raiser/Parent w/NLK9's Program?**

Honestly, it took me a while to decide I wanted to be a part of the program. I was concerned about how attached I would get and the rules that I would have to follow. My initial perspective was focused on how the program would affect me. But, prior to my application submittal, I had a moment of realization that this program had very little to do with me. This program provides the opportunity for someone to have their life back, and that is a noble cause. Plus, every time that I get to see "Delta", his excitement reminds me that I am important and am playing a key role in his life and growth as a future service dog. That is a real honor.

### **What has your experience been like so far?**

My experience as a Puppy raiser has been very positive. Delta is such a joy to be around. He loves his soccer ball, and you can't help but grin from ear to ear whenever he is with you. We all know that it takes a village to raise a child and it is no different than raising a dog. It is very important to have a solid working relationship between the Puppy raiser and the Dog's Handler; Delta wouldn't be the dog that he is today without the cooperation of both the Handler and the Puppy raiser that is for sure.

### **If any, what types of life- lessons have you learned while caring for a puppy in your home?**

I think one of the biggest life lessons has been to find simplicity in life. There is so much we miss when our eyes are glued to our phones or when we concern ourselves with what someone else is up to. Delta appreciates all the little things that I take for granted sometimes, and he is helping me

step back long enough to enjoy being more present in my own life today.

### **What is one memorable moment that you can share about Delta?**

I share a memorable moment with Delta every Friday when I pick him up from the yard. Sometimes he will see me before I have a chance to see him, but the moment that we lock eyes he starts to wiggle his tail and go bonkers just at the sight of me. That right there is something that always makes me feel so special and loved by this wonderful dog! He also loves his food bowl so much that if anything else gets him more excited than that, like when he sees me, then that defiantly means that he loves me too.

### **If someone were to ask you about being a Puppy Raiser /Parent, what advice would you give them?**

My advice to anyone that is interested in being involved with New Life K9's, is that you must know deep down in your heart why you want to be involved with the program. These dogs are not accessories or part time pets. They are someone's second chance at a renewed life. I don't think that someone should be involved if their heart is not in it for all the right reasons. Do not commit to the program if you are looking for notoriety or recognition from others around you. But, if you want to be involved simply because it is a great chance to "give back" to a First Responder or Veteran, then by giving them this "Leash on Life" all over again, is something that you should do . It is more than just a selfless act, and it will change the way that you see the world around you that is for sure!

**Be a Part of something greater than yourself!  
Apply to be a Puppy Raiser or Sitter for one of our  
Canine friends. You can help save a life!  
For Information, please contact:  
Email: [newlife@newlifeK9s.org](mailto:newlife@newlifeK9s.org)**

- 1) THE BOND SHOULD BE MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL.
- 2) THE PROGRESS SHOULD ALWAYS REMAIN A WORK IN PROGRESS.
- 3) THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF BOTH SPECIES AFFECTS THE BOND BETWEEN THE TWO.

The primary responsibility rests on our shoulders. If we are not exercising the proper patience and nurturing the bond that we will be guiding our dog in maturing into, by trusting that we have their welfare in mind at all times, we would have failed in our part of the whole process. In this respect, it takes a *high level of discipline* because we are setting and guiding the foundation of this bond with our canine when he/she is the most vulnerable and dependent on us; which is through their formative years.

As we do our part, our furry little friends learn to form **attachments** with us just as adolescents form attachments with their parents or primary caregiver. The **attachment** we form will be dependent on the manner in which we raise the puppy. In New Life K-9 the attachment we strive for is the **Authoritative Attachment**.

With the **Authoritative Attachment** parenting style, the parent sets limits and boundaries for behaviors and then works with their children to help them make appropriate decisions. They encourage maturity, but they listen and forgive (not punish) if the child falls short. They consider themselves guides rather than an **Authoritarian** parent, *who has a do as I say not as I do type of attitude*.

Keeping in mind everything we are doing is to establish a **strong bond** with our canine friend/companion through perpetual dialogue and interaction, it is no different than any other relationship that we encounter in our lives: if we do not take the time to nurture the proper care we will have not nurtured a strong bond with our dog, as the adage goes..."Without water the flower withers".

The bond between the canine and caregiver is strengthened by, as the New Life K-9's Prison Pup Program Manual states..."contact, kindness,

sustenance, affection, acceptance and making reunions with a greeting ceremony".

These are very important things to do with your canine. However, your creativity will assist in your strengthening of this bond with the various personalities we most definitely interact with in this adventure.

### **About Jennifer Arnold and the Bond-Based Method:**

Jennifer Arnold is the Founder of Canine Assistants and has become a nationally recognized educator in the Bond-Based methods used throughout the country with the teaching & preparation of service Dogs for those in the community with disabilities. Her method is simple; our dog's greatest predictor of success is the "Bond" that develops between human and canine. The *stronger* the bond, which of course should always be mutually beneficial to both involved, the *greater* their success for helping everyone around them.

### **Recommended books by Jennifer Arnold include:**

*Through A Dog's Eyes*

*Love Is All You Need*

*In A Dog's Heart*

**Canine Assistants:** is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing service dogs for children and adults who have physical disabilities, epilepsy, or other special needs. For more information about the Bond-Based Method:

[Canineassistants.org](http://Canineassistants.org)

[@CanineAssistants](https://www.facebook.com/CanineAssistants)



# Operation Gratitude Continued....

We honored our guests Pat Nolan, aka "The Dogfather" from new Life K9's and Greg Gallo with his Service dog "Eddie" by asking them to share their stories with the audience eager to hear their every word. There were many moments where men and women cried, both speakers and listeners alike, and it was apparent by the tone of the room that we were witnessing firsthand what real heroes consist of in our communities just by what they had to share of their own personal journeys. Having the Administration attend the event was a very significant part of the ceremony, where even the opportunity to honor a man (the son of Lieutenant Verbeek here at PVSP) that had paid the ultimate sacrifice was possible. Jared Verbeek was a part of our hearts and minds that day as handlers Ernie Serrano and Keith Erickson stood on the podium reading a personal letter about him written by the Verbeek family themselves. Afterwards a painting done by inmate Angel Rueles was presented to Lieutenant Verbeek in memorial of his fallen son and soldier.

The day would not have been complete without recognizing the handlers that have signed up for their roles in raising these New Life K9's and future Service Dogs. Handler Keith Erickson read his piece "My name is Delta" while the rest of the team handlers stood affront the podium proudly, as the audience was captured intently by what was read. The piece (*My name is Delta*) was written through the eyes of canine Delta himself and addressed the roles in their entirety as to how much these men have put into the program themselves and each, other while being a part of New Life K9's here at Pleasant Valley State Prison. "These men", handler Keith Erickson stated, "have signed up to ensure the success of these dog's even when they themselves have no solid ideas as to their own futures and whether many of them will even get out of prison one day". Those words could make anyone stop and take a moment to reflect on just what these inmates are putting into the program. The day is going to be one to remember here on D-Facility, and we all look forward to many more opportunities like this where we can give back to the community.

## My Name is Delta...

am a New Life K9's Service Dog here at Pleasant Valley State Prison, and I am going to save lives when I graduate just like I already am here.....



**Everyday 22 veterans and First Responders commit suicide after losing their struggles with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Please help me and my friends save each and every one of them before they give up on their precious lives.**

**Join 22 For Life At:  
NewLifeK9's.Org**



# FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

Personal thoughts from the families of our New Life K9's Handlers



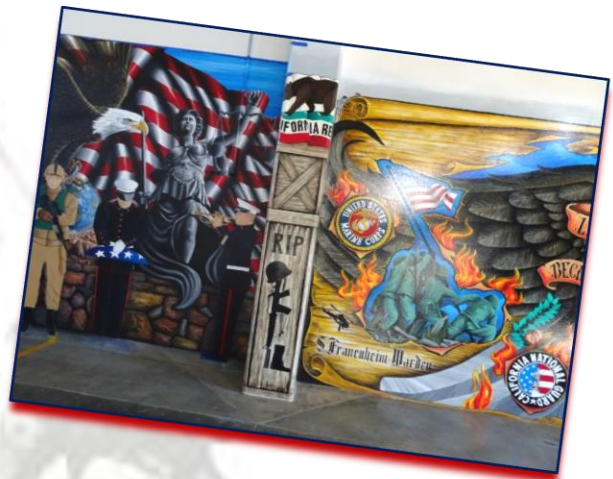
Mural Project by: Angel Rueles



Mural Project by: Angel Rueles



Painted hats & card by: Keith Erickson



Mural Project by: Angel Rueles

## **"Blank Page-Open Heart"**

Love comes back to the surface from a long cold winters  
freeze grips my soul, turns me inside out from who I used  
to be.

Friendship that is unconditional like that of a bond with no  
kryptonite, this beautiful creature erasing all of the  
darkness becoming my much needed light.  
Another chance to give more of myself when at times hard  
it may be, I yearn to grow into middle age so that I share a  
bigger piece of me.

This dog...with all his hair and slobber, to him I hold a  
past of no concern, his blank pages a heart that honors me  
with a place of my own inside of him.

"Nelson" my friend and dog....  
I will never forget you.

**By: Chad Thomas**



"The things I noticed the most about my father is that he has a lot more patience since he has joined the NLK9's Program. He has a lot more patience when it comes to feeling overwhelmed with things that are out of his control with his family. I can honestly say that it feels like I have my old dad back because he is a Veteran that served his country and came back from deployment a different man in a lot of ways. So, for those of you that do not have a loved one that is incarcerated, this is a blessing."

*A very Proud Daughter, Alexis*

"My Husband Keith really enjoys everything about the NLK9's program. He talks about "Delta" all the time whether it is on the phone, in letters or out there in the visiting room. Sometimes he lets Delta listen to me on the phone telling him that we love him and making funny kiss noises to Delta. Thank you to everyone that was/is involved in bringing the guys this program because it is something that many of us (families) never thought was possible because of where they are (prison). My Hubby really needed to feel the emotions that the dogs bring out in all of these guys that are involved in it."

*😊 Jamie*

"When my nephew Jason started the Dog Program, I really did not know what to expect. But it seemed right away that he started to talk about it on the phone during our calls and in his letters more than anything else that was going on in there. We live down in San Diego where I have a "Petting Zoo", so I am very familiar with a lot of animals. I even considered starting a breeding service for future service dog's years ago. I think maybe this is a sign that it may be time. I can't wait to see what kind of man my nephew becomes after having such a big responsibility like this as a handler in the program. It also made me feel really good that he wants to do something that is really positive and is helping another human being and not just himself."

*Aunt Shawneen*

"Our Brother Chad has really opened up and shown tremendous growth since starting the NLK9's Dog Program. Coming from a family full of Military Veterans, Past and present, we are all very proud of him for serving his country in a way that would not have been possible if not for the program. We are also very proud of the other men that are in the program and have become supportive of him and the rest of the team."

*Craig & Cindy*

"The NLK9's Program brings out the best in each one of us and makes us the team that we are"....



*The Team supporting the fight against Cancer*



*The Team having a meeting with visitors....*

*"It is about being of service to others in need that makes life full of a purpose that cannot be taken away from you" .....*

## **Book Report of the Month**

**Book: "Weekends w/Daisy"**

**Handler: Richard Marquez**

Reading "Weekends with Daisy" helped me understand that the weekend puppy raisers and their families play an important role in the development of the dogs in our care. It is a very big responsibility for anyone to take the time out of their everyday life and make sure that these dogs are more than just provided for in the sense that they are fed & nurtured; they also need to make certain that they are teaching these dogs how to be actual service dogs that are going to help save a life when they are older and able to do so. The communication between the puppy raiser and us as handlers needs to be a two-way street that has the best interest of the dogs at heart at all times. For example, it may not seem like a big deal but if a dog vomits or has the runs it needs to be documented and communicated so that the dog does not get overlooked and perhaps gets a lot worse in their illness (whatever the case may be).

For the handler to share with their puppy raiser any progress or accomplishments that are taking place with your dog so that they know when they can help play to the dog's strengths and perhaps enhance their capabilities by exposing them further to situations that will help the dog succeed even more.

At the end of the day, it should always be at the forefront of our minds that our goal (both raiser and handler) is to help these dogs reach their fullest potential and believe me they will surprise you with their cognitive abilities. Reading this book really gave me a better understanding of what takes place when two strangers that come from different walks of life set out to make a difference for reasons that may seem quite different, but yet, are actually so alike in ways that restore one's humanity than you realize.



Handler Richard Marquez of "Team Zach"

***"It should always be at the forefront of our minds that our goal is to help these dogs reach their fullest potential".....***



# *The Love That Only He Could Have Given Me*.....BY: Jason Draper

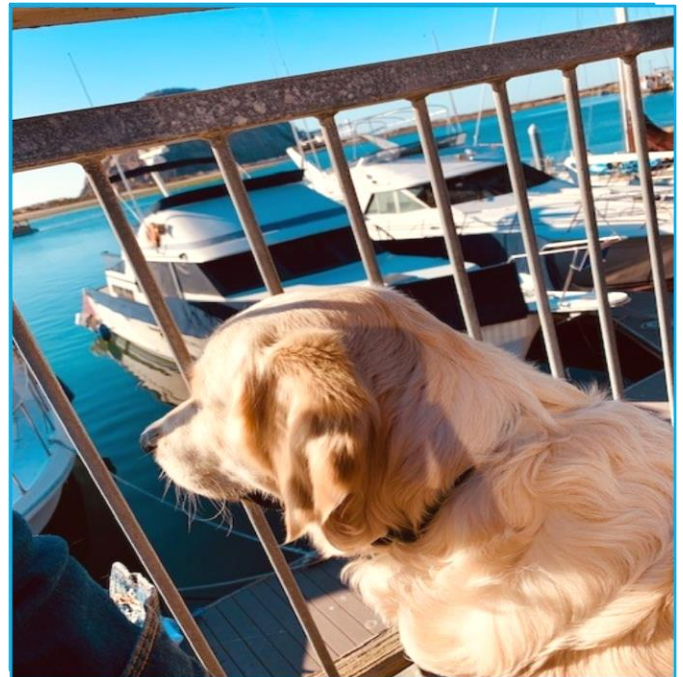
When I first got here to Pleasant Valley Prison, I was a little bitter inside because I was hoping to go to a prison that was much closer to my family, so that I could see them more often. I guess God had a different plan for me. Coming to this prison has opened a lot of doors for me that I now understand were necessary for me to start becoming who I am today. I got into the New Life K9's dog program and did not realize that it was going to be such a huge responsibility, much like raising a kid. But I would not change this experience for anything else in the world after having come so far because I am learning all about unconditional love and the way that I myself needed to start loving those around me and appreciating them more.

Having the dogs love you and play with you and want to be with you twenty four hours a day is a constant reminder that we all should start seeing and appreciating the smaller things in life that we often just take for granted just because we see those things every day. In August I was assigned to Carson, a spunky Golden retriever, and even though he is no longer here in the program I have learned a great deal from him. For example, I have many bad days in here because this is a life that I am never going to get used to despite the fact that I know I am paying my dues for the mistakes that I have made in my life. I would sit here with Carson after feeling like I needed to just cry or lean on someone, and this creature that was placed into my life for the time that he was, just made me realize that I am not alone as I might have thought that I was.

“Thank you, little buddy, for changing the way that I see the world the way that I should have”.....

For those of you that didn't know Carson, believe me he is such a goofball that you cannot help but laugh and smile; yes, even when he is testing your patience on the leash. This dog has loved and depended on me while he was in my care and I will never forget the way that he made me feel, as I too depended on him to love me the way that only “He” could have ever loved me.

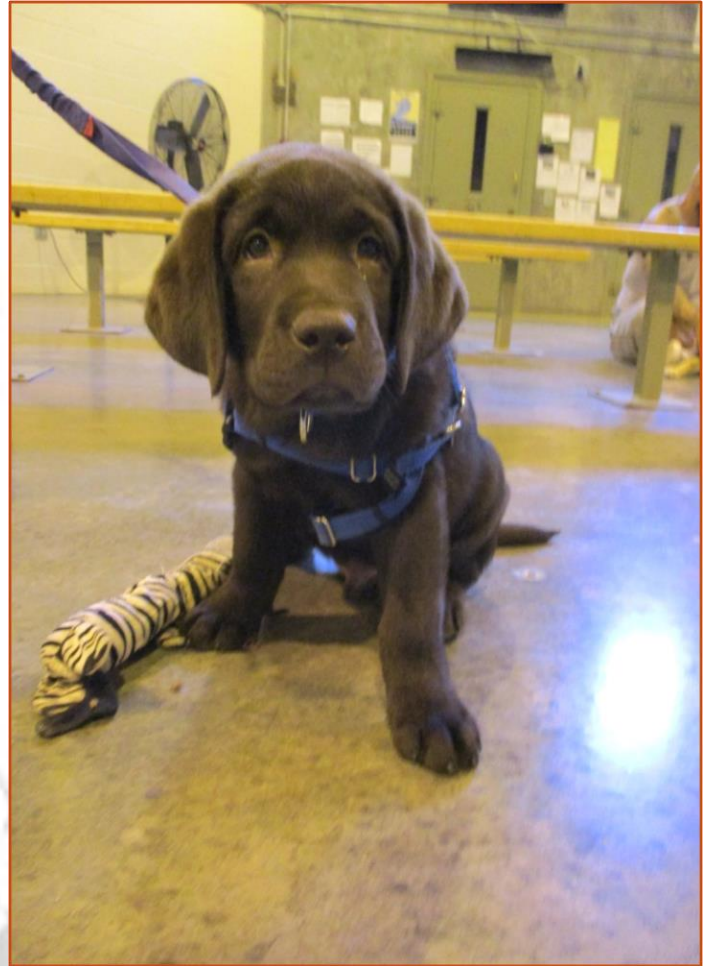
I want everyone to know that doesn't get to experience these dogs firsthand that they are having a great influence on our rehabilitation. We are getting these dogs ready for a First Responder or a Veteran in the community, but in reality, we are also learning how to be better sons, fathers, husbands and human beings altogether the way that we are supposed to be. I think that is something that we could not learn in any other group that goes on in the prison system.



Carson enjoying a day at the port while taking in the sunshine and docked boats.

# FINN: The Final Addition to Our PVSP-New Life K9's Family

This bundle of joy, as rambunctious as he can be at times, could not have come at a better time. Just when we were reaching our final cap of ten future service dogs here at Pleasant Valley D-Facility, they brought us this adorable chocolate Labrador Retriever creatively named "Finn". Finn walked into the crowd of other dogs here in the gym and showed no sign of hesitancy as he got to know each and every one of his new family members, including the handlers that were sitting in chairs assembled into a circle. If you ask his handler Ernie Serrano what he often refers to Finn as, he will tell you jokingly that Finn is much like a "*Tasmanian Devil*" that wants to get into just about everything and chase food down like it is going extinct. But, after getting to spend time with Finn you will realize that he is just a puppy and is getting to know the world around him just like every other dog does. We all love our final addition to the program, and he defiantly gets a lot of love and affection walking the yard with his handler everywhere that he goes



# FINN ♥

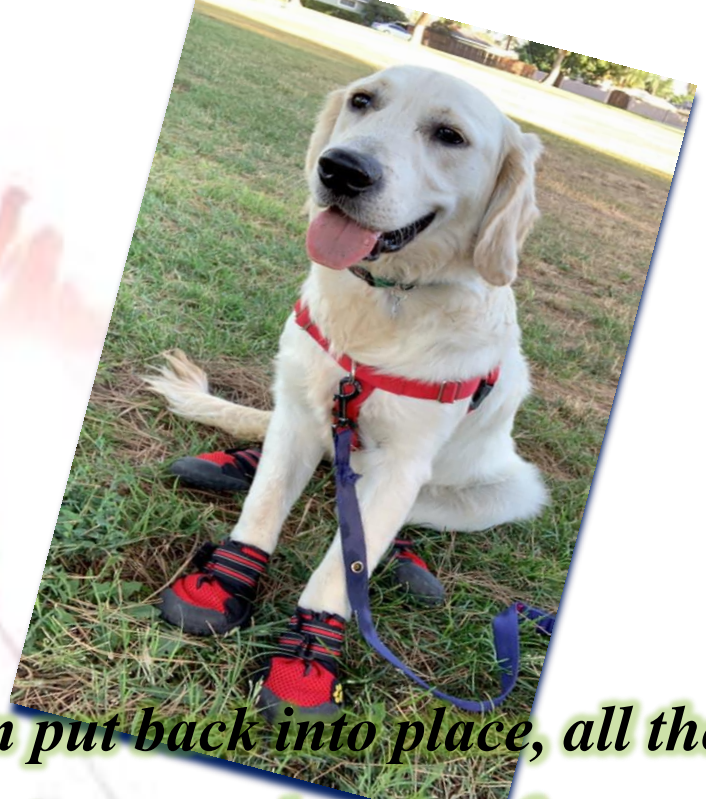


# ♥ Bits & Pieces ♥

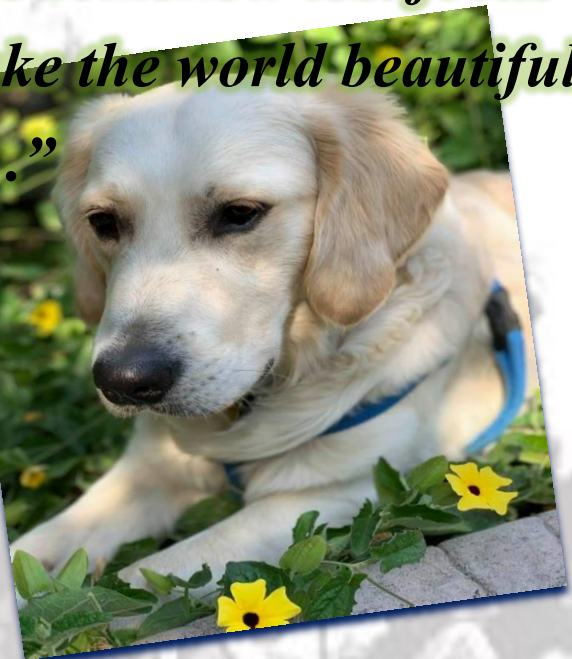
*“Saving Lives through the Healing Power of the Human-Canine Bond”*

*“Thank you to all the Puppy Raisers who take such amazing pictures of the dogs”*

*- PVSP Handlers*



*“The love from our dogs can put back into place, all the bits & pieces of things that we somehow lost focus of...the simple things that make the world beautiful again.....”*





# THE DOMINANCE THEORY-*THE TRUTH ABOUT* *THE "ALPHA DOG"-YOU BE THE JUDGE!*

By: Keith Erickson

Trainers across the country –many of whom consider themselves longstanding professionals in the canine social & behavioral field-believe that the best way to establish an effective relationship with your dog and self is by “laying down the law” with them before they develop the misconception that *they* are actually in charge. They have adopted this misconception that man must establish himself as “Alpha” in the relationship so that the dog will not walk all over him. If you believe that imposing your will on anyone is o.k., then this theory may seem quite natural to you while raising your dog. However, if you consider your dog more than just your *pet* and perhaps more of a *family* member, then you are like me and cringe when you see a dog being treated as if they do not have a choice in the way that they do even the simplest of everyday things, like being made to “sit” for no apparent reason whatsoever. Dogs are to be loved, rather than just treated as objects to command until they learn to meet our expectations. So, as misguided as the dominance theory is, why has it been so traditional and customary for all these years?

In the 1930's case studies by behaviorists began to surface where wolves' behaviors (keeping in mind that our dogs today descended from the) were being applied to circumstances that were not as valid as they were being proclaimed to be. Wild wolves were being placed into captivity and caged amongst other wolves that were also captured and forced to live with one another. The problem with this is that the situation of forcing wolves from various packs to live with each other placed them into stressful situations from the start. The problem with this concept, when applying it to the “Alpha Male” theory, is that wolves from the wild are not made up of random wolves that are from multiple packs. In addition to this, they are not *forced* to live with each other either, especially in situations that elevate stress and anxiety in their behaviors, causing them to fight for their survival amongst the pack.

When speaking whether or not there is actually a hierarchy in a pack, I guess it would be best to say that there *is* a family order that keeps the family functioning much like that of a human household. For example, even though more than one family may *choose* to unify, the mating pairs of the pack will be the ones to remain after their offspring have grown and set off to establish families of their own. If a problem should arise within the pack, the mating pair will apply whatever means of correction is necessary as a social behavioral method is done in a family dynamic. Wolves, as dogs, develop the same type of attitude as to what is acceptable and non-acceptable amongst each other as humans do.

Ultimately, the way that you treat your dog is going to determine the basis of your bond. The bond will then be what your relationship is formulated upon, and nonetheless going to define whether or not you have a relationship that is *mutually beneficial* to the both of you as *team*, instead of that of master and subordinate. As a New Life K9's handler myself, I have learned through the method we are using, which is the *Bond-based Method*, that we are only limiting our dogs from excelling when we treat them & train them to listen to commands instead of encouraging them to think more for themselves and make choices that are in the guidelines of being socially acceptable behaviors.

**“Ultimately, the way that you treat your dog is going to determine the basis of your bond. The bond will *then* be what your relationship is formulated on”.....**



# ONE on ONE

Interview with NLK9 Handler: Ray Avila

## Why did you join the NLK9's Program?

I felt that by getting involved with something like this I would be stepping out of my comfort zone & challenging myself to actually do something that was not just about myself.

## What have you learned about yourself and others while being involved with the program?

I have been able to tap into a part of me that I feel has been locked away for a very long time since being a young boy/man. What I mean by this, is that I realized that I no longer have to wear a mask to conceal many of the feelings & emotions that I have going on inside of me. I got so used to hiding these emotions because of the way that I was raised and grew up in the system from being so young when I entered it. The most revealing thing to me about this self-discovery though, is that I realized a lot of my teammates were also going through the very same things that I was during my experience.

## Do you feel that there are life-lessons to be learned from being a dog handler, and what are some that you have discovered personally?

For a long time I was only responsible for myself even when I have had my Wife at my side; it is a lot different when you are with an actual "living being" twenty four hours a day taking care of them (dog) as if they are your child depending on you every minute of their growth. So, I would say that I have learned how to treat others around me that are in my life better than I did before.



## Because the NLK9 program is founded on the "Bond-Based method" of teaching, what have you personally taken from the significance of establishing a bond with your dog?

That it is more about an "equal relationship" than anything else based on love, understanding and communication. Without those things it leaves a lot of open room for error where a healthy relationship is concerned and the trust factor between yourself and dog is not going to be there for either of you when you depend on one another so much.

## Do you think more inmates should want to be involved with the dog programs?

Yes. I think they should if they want to take advantage of their incarceration and learn more about themselves in the process of changing directions in their live, while at the same time giving back to another person that is going to depend on these dogs for a second chance in their own lives.

## What will you take the most from this program after you have transferred?

I can easily say that it is the bonds that you build with each one of these dogs and your teammates even when it feels like you feel like you cannot agree with another handler in the group. It is about the dogs and the process of growth that matter above all else, everything else that needs to be worked out in the process of that is just crumbs in a box when you try comparing the two. When I transfer, I still plan on being a part of this program at another prison because it feels more like a family to me than anything else.

# ***“Final Thoughts” from the Four- Paws Bulletin Newsletter Team***

They say that each one of us has our own journey to take in this lifetime where every one of our experiences will eventually lead us to where it is that we need to be. For a lot of us here today (incarcerated), that concept could not be any truer than said. You see, like Robert Frost meant in his classic poem “The Road Not Taken”; it is these very roads that few travel where we learn the most about who we are and need to be in the world. True, we have lived lives recklessly, harmed others in the wake of our being selfish, but yet, here we are today trying to make a difference in another human beings life with the New Life K9’s Program. They may never get to know who we are, where we come from, or how tough our lives had been before we became involved with this program, but what we are doing here is truly selfless. The best part about this is, that we are learning more from these dogs and New Life K9’s Organization as a whole that nothing else could have ever taught us about ourselves, and we are learning how to be better than we were before. Within the group of men/handlers there are still cracks that may never go

away completely, meaning that each one of us still have a lot of healing to do individually, but, in time we believe that this opportunity is giving us the time & patience with ourselves to fix all that we need to in order to live the right ways. We want everyone to know that reads the contents of this Newsletter that rehabilitation cannot be accomplished if men are not given the *means* to establish a strong sense of self-worth and hope in their lives. Applying the life-skills that we do by nurturing & teaching these canines is more than just preparing them for their own lives ahead. The whole process involves having to look *deep* inside of yourself and pull out the *better* parts of you that you once thought were unreachable. That in itself is a powerful thing, when you give a man sitting in here the hope for a better tomorrow, after everything that his life has been up until this point.....

***-The Four-Paws Team***

## **Four Paws Team, PVSP:**

Keith Erickson-Editor in Chief  
Derek Romero-Editor  
John Demery-Editor  
Ernie Serrano-Chief Interview  
Ernesto Sanchez-Interview executive

## **Contributing Writer’s:**

Keith Erickson  
Frankie Luzano  
Ernie Serrano  
Jason Draper  
Ray Avila  
Richard Marquez  
&

The families of our PVSP New Life K9 Handlers

## **Contributing Artists:**

Keith Erickson  
Angel Rueles  
Chad Thomas

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***S. Frauenheim, Warden-Pleasant Valley Prison...  
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PVSP Administration as a whole.....  
PVSP Population (For embracing the dogs).....***

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making NLK9 here at PVSP what it  
is becoming:***

***Lieutenant Stiles, D-Facility/ NLK9 Liaison.....  
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