

The Women's Fund

of the Community Foundation for South Central New York

September 2018

This Veteran's Partner Always Has Her Back

July 12 marked the start of a new phase in the partnership between Jacqueline and her canine companion, Komodog. That was the day the human-dog team graduated from Stand With Me, a program that serves military veterans with service-related mental health disabilities. Fourteen months of training had transformed Jacqueline into a knowledgeable dog handler and Komodog into an official service dog—well mannered, disciplined, and ready to support Jacqueline anywhere she goes.

"My anxiety has gone down so much, knowing that I can bring him with me," says Jacqueline, a Binghamton resident who served six years as a nuclear engineer in the U.S. Navy.

Jacqueline is the first woman veteran to graduate from the program, operated by Stand With Me Assistance Dog Team Training in the Town of Binghamton. The Women's Fund recently awarded the organization \$8,000 to support

its service to women veterans and their dogs.

Stand With Me serves both male and female veterans, free of charge. Frances "Myrph" McMahon, a professional dog trainer who also spent ten years counseling people with mental health challenges, founded the nonprofit after years of fielding requests from vets. "They would search the Internet for dog training, find my Myrph's Dog Training web site and call me to ask for assistance training their dog to become their service dog," she says.

Veterans had few viable alternatives. An already-trained service dog costs \$25,000-\$50,000 on average, they told McMahon. Financial assistance is available but hard to come by. "They would call me and say, 'Why can't I train my own dog?'"

McMahon spends 12 months or more working with each veteran-dog team, in group classes and one-on-one. Much of the work takes place

continued on back



Benjamin Margolius, vice president of the Southern Tier Veterans' Support Group, with Jacqueline and her canine companion, Komodog and Frances "Myrph" McMahon

2018 GRANTS FROM THE WOMEN'S FUND

- Binghamton Rescue Mission** \$1,000 for a security camera for the women's residence
- Catholic Charities Tompkins/Tioga, Tioga Outreach Center** \$4,000 for basic needs supplies for senior women
- DCMO BOCES** \$5,000 for a career academy for low-income teen girls
- Oxford Community Youth Center** \$8,000 for a restorative justice program for teen girls at risk of dropping out
- Stand With Me Assistance Dog Team Training** \$8,000 to help female veterans with mental health disabilities train their dogs to become service dogs

TOTAL AWARDED: \$26,000

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Noted Book Critic Charms Guests at Annual Breakfast

A crowd of 238 flocked to the Holiday Inn in Binghamton on June 7 to celebrate another year of empowerment for women and girls at the Women's Fund's 14th annual breakfast.

Keynote speaker Maureen Corrigan shared stories of her life and career as a noted book critic, including an account of her first writing job, at the *Village Voice*. Corrigan loved writing for the *Voice*, she said. "I could bring my whole person to the book reviews."

Today, Corrigan reviews books for NPR's "Fresh Air" (a job she's done for 30 years) and for the Washington Post; she's also a professor of literary criticism at Georgetown University. "When I talk about a book and that book gets a boost, that's the best part of my job," she told the audience.

Along with Corrigan, guests at the breakfast heard from Nicole Rouhana, of the Women's Fund Leadership Committee, about the more than \$150,000 in grants that the Fund has given to 60 recipients since its founding in 2002.

One of the 2017 grantee organizations, the Broome County Humane Society, received \$3,000 from the Women's Fund to provide a safe, temporary home for pets belonging to women who are escaping from domestic violence. "We take the animals and provide all the vet care they need," said Karen Matson, executive director at the Humane Society, speaking at the breakfast. That leaves victims of domestic violence with one less thing to worry about as they gain control of their lives.

Many thanks to the Special Events and Leadership Committees of the Women's Fund for organizing another outstanding breakfast, and to our event sponsors for their generous support.

Stand With Me *continued from page 1*

out in the world, in venues such as restaurants and stores, where the dog learns to behave perfectly, follow commands and protect its owner. At the same time, the vet—who has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or another service-related mental health condition—learns to trust that the dog will keep him or her safe.

At graduation, the dog trades its training vest for a vest announcing that this is a certified service dog, according to standards set by the American With Disabilities Act (ADA). Unlike the all-too-common "service dog" vests that come with no training at all—sold by scam organizations to unwary owners—this vest indicates that the dog has impeccable manners, control and training for public situations, says McMahon. "The dog also has to be trained to do at least two very specific tasks that assist the person in overcoming or coping with their disability symptoms."

For a dog that graduates

from Stand With Me, one of those tasks might be to stand attentively near the veteran in a crowded store, maintaining a "zone of safety." This allows a vet with PTSD to relax his or her guard in public. Some dogs are trained to wake their owners at the first sign of a nightmare.

Female veterans have some special needs, McMahon says. Women in the armed services face not only discrimination but also sexual harassment and abuse, which can lead to a condition called military sexual trauma (MST). "For men, the dog is a space-blocker, a nightmare-waker and an anxiety reducer," she says. "For the women, it makes them feel protected and guarded as well, which is really important for reducing their anxiety levels when going out in public."

As a minority among veterans, women in some parts of the U.S. have trouble finding appropriate services. Fortunately, the Binghamton area seems to be one of the better locations.

"The VA (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs) has a women's health primary care physician at the community outpatient clinic in Binghamton," says Benjamin Margolius, vice president of the Southern Tier Veterans' Support Group. Binghamton is a good place for veterans' services in general, he adds, with organizations such as the Binghamton Veterans Center and the Southern Tier Branch of Chittenango-based Clear Path for Veterans.

"I have had an amazing experience," says Jacqueline of her engagement with local services for veterans. Now that Komodog is an official service dog, Jacqueline's position is even stronger. "The fact that I can bring him pretty much anywhere makes me feel a lot safer," she says.

With help from the Women's Fund and Stand With Me Assistance Dog Team Training, more women veterans in our region soon will be able to say the same.

New BOCES Course Widens' Girls' Horizons

An alternative school for grades 7-12, the Career Academy at DCMO BOCES aims to get students ready to succeed in the world. But unlike boys in the program, who often find jobs in fields such as auto mechanics or construction, many of the girls graduate with no idea of what to do next.

"They've never been exposed to all the opportunities out there," says Anne Walters, a licensed social worker at the Career Academy. The girls often gravitate toward courses that prepare them for lower-paying jobs—in food service, for example, or child care. They don't know what else is available, and they have no plans.

Hoping to give girls better choices and tools for the future, DCMO BOCES—which serves Delaware, Chenango, Madison and Otsego

Counties—is launching a program this fall called Healthy Choices, Healthy Lifestyles. Combining classroom work, field trips, volunteer projects and other activities, the program will serve 25 girls, helping them develop self-esteem, master new skills and explore career opportunities.

Girls with an interest in medicine, for instance, might do a classroom module on anatomy, volunteer in a hospital or nursing home and hear from speakers who hold various jobs in health care, among other activities. The program will also teach girls about healthy eating and cooking and have them run events such as the school's celebration of International Peace Day.

The Women's Fund has awarded DCMO BOCES \$5,000 toward the program.