The first thing you need to know is: Jon LOVES puns. Specifically, puns related to space and planets and such. The reason Jon loves them is because the highly skilled service dog he received from Freedom Service Dogs in 2018 came with the name "Solar"—giving Jon endless opportunities for wordplay, even after surviving a serious health scare late last year that was no laughing matter.

Jon—who is 28 years old and lives in the Chicago metro area—has Becker muscular dystrophy, a genetic disorder that gradually makes the body’s muscles weaker and smaller. He uses a power wheelchair and is unable to walk or bend over. Prior to getting Solar, he lived alone in an apartment with daily assistance from a caregiver, but his mother, Cheryl, feared for his safety. After all, if Jon fell out of his wheelchair and couldn’t reach his phone or an emergency cord, it could be hours before anyone realized he was in trouble.

In addition to the safety aspect, Jon had his own reasons for wanting a service dog. “I hate asking other people for help with opening heavy doors or picking up things that I drop,” he says. “I’ve always had an ‘I can do it myself’ attitude, so my biggest hope was that a service dog could eliminate the need for asking people to help with things I can’t do.”

After a three-year wait, Jon was matched with Solar, a gentle, intelligent, mixed-breed dog who came to FSD after being transferred from a shelter in New Mexico. Says Jon, “When I met Solar, he wasn’t what I expected—he was way cooler!” Jon and Solar worked with their FSD trainer, Allison Peltier, to address Jon’s specific needs, including having Solar go for help, pull an emergency cord, pick up items off the floor, and open the doors to Jon’s apartment building.

In addition to performing these tasks, Solar has given Jon the confidence to get out more and enjoy life. With his faithful service dog at his side, Jon has explored downtown Chicago, taken the Metra commuter rail, visited the Sears Tower Skydeck, and met one of his heroes, CM Punk, “the best pro wrestler in the world!” according to Jon.

Last October, Jon entered the hospital in critical condition and stayed there for five months, during which time no one knew whether he would survive. “Life threw us out of orbit, and I was sent off to space without my light,” says Jon. “I was lost in space without Solar and honestly, he was all I could think about. Mentally, I knew there wasn’t any way I was leaving him behind, and I was going to find his gravitational pull again! During this time, FSD messaged me and emailed me to make sure I was getting better, and it meant a lot to me that they reached out. Although it was difficult, I fought my hardest and tried staying positive, and thanks to Solar and his gravitational pull, I was pulled back to orbit. Solar was once again the center of my universe and my light was back. We were together once again!”

In June, Jon and Solar traveled to FSD for their one-year public-access test, which they passed with flying colors. Says trainer Allison, “Their connection has grown tenfold in the year they’ve been together, and it’s amazing to see a team communicate so effortlessly. I couldn’t be more proud.”

Today, Jon sums up their partnership with perhaps his finest—and truest—pun: “Solar is my devoted best friend, my constant companion, my lifeline, and my infinite power source.”
It is a great honor to be writing my first letter to you as chair of the FSD Board of Directors. Since I became involved with FSD over three years ago, I have been in awe of this amazing organization. From our CEO Michele Ostrander (who I have been lucky enough to know for many years in the nonprofit world) to the dog care staff at our training facility, the passion and joy I see in each and every member of the FSD team is inspiring. My fellow board members share this dedication, working to do whatever it takes to empower the FSD team to succeed. At every turn, the organization continues to challenge itself to be better, to do more—the energy that creates is electric!

FSD is unique in that we are able to provide our clients with assistance that changes their lives and a companion that will be their faithful best friend—functional assistance with wet noses and tail wags! We get to see our clients find success in our dogs’ success, which of course translates into our own. It’s this win/win/win that inspired me to get involved and drives me to expand my involvement.

I’ve been a dog person all my life. My first childhood dog was a rescue with a heart murmur who wasn’t supposed to live more than a few years, but defied the odds to live to 14+. I’ve had terriers and collies and American staffordshires. I’m lucky to have Layla, an FSD dog who found a different career path hiking mountain trails and sleeping on pillows. Both my mom and my partner volunteer at FSD, and I am inspired by their involvement and the joy it brings them.

My professional background is accounting, finance, and consulting. While I will always be a “numbers person,” I enjoy using my business experience to contribute creative solutions to our challenges. I take the reins of the chairmanship at an exciting time: We have our facility up and running well, our financial status is exceptionally strong, the FSD team has expanded and evolved to meet the needs of our clients, and our dog training and care team is laser focused on graduating the highest quality service dogs to meet the varied needs of our clients.

But our clients’ needs are growing—and meeting them will be my greatest focus. We will be challenged to push our limits while maintaining our standards. We will be required to be creative, to stretch, to think outside the box. Some of this will be hard, and we will need to be willing to try new things to move ourselves forward. I am excited to be a part of this challenge and see FSD continue to be the life-changing organization our clients have come to depend on.

Thank you for the privilege of being part of FSD.
Six inspirational client-dog teams graduated from Freedom Service Dogs on June 15 at Parker Arts, Culture & Events Center. The honorees included three veterans who participated in FSD’s Operation Full Circle program, in which veterans with post-traumatic stress (PTS) and traumatic brain injury work alongside our trainers for four months to train the dogs provided to them by FSD. One additional veteran and two clients with mobility disabilities also graduated after attending a two-week placement class at FSD’s training center. The event also featured a demonstration by members of our community-based Puppy-Raising Club who showed off the skills they’ve instilled in their young charges.

Mark your calendar for our Winter 2019 Graduation on Sunday, Dec. 15 from 6:30–8:30 p.m. at Parker Arts, Culture & Events Center in Parker, Colorado. The event is free and open to the public. For more information, visit freedomservicedogs.org/events.

“Slate let me know that I could go back out in public, that I didn’t have to have nightmares every night, and that attending functions at my kids’ schools could be a possibility again.”

“Having a service dog will help me be more independent, increasing my life’s pleasures and my husband’s ability to enjoy his life independently and together as my partner, my love, and my best friend—not as my nurse and caretaker.”

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2019 EVENTS

For more information about all our events, visit freedomservicedogs.org/events.

FACES OF FREEDOM
SPORTING CLAYS TOURNAMENT
DENVER

On June 28, 232 enthusiastic supporters took part in our Faces of Freedom: Denver Sporting Clays Tournament, presented by Powershift, at Kiowa Creek Sporting Club in Bennett, Colorado.

In its seventh year, the event raised more than $178,000 to support Operation Freedom, a program of FSD that places service dogs with veterans.

Diamonds in the Ruff

OCTOBER 12 • HYATT REGENCY DENVER TECH CENTER

Join us for a magical evening at the eighth annual Diamonds in the Ruff! Enjoy cocktails, silent and live auctions, a delicious dinner, and a special performance by Spinphony, a dynamic electric string quartet—along with the inspirational stories of people whose lives have been transformed by the magical gift of a Freedom Service Dog.

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT EVENT SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES:
Contact NADINE PACE
EVENTS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER
NPACE@FREEDOMSERVICEDOGS.ORG | 303-922-6231 X216
Ten years ago, Elisa Morgan had just stepped down from a 20-year post as CEO of an international nonprofit. After a few months, she was looking for something “big” to do. From time to time, Elisa and her husband, Evan, had cared for their son’s Rottweiler, and when the latest stint ended, they knew they wanted a dog of their own. After searching online at various shelters, Elisa stumbled upon FSD’s website and found Wilson, a 3-year-old Rottweiler/shepherd mix with elbow dysplasia that prevented him from becoming a service dog—but allowed Elisa and Evan to adopt him in 2009.

Flash forward to 2019: Wilson is nearly 13, and the Morgans have been thinking ahead, knowing that Wilson won’t always be with them. Elisa had been looking at adoptable dogs for over a year, but Evan rejected each one before finally asking, “Can’t we just get another dog from FSD?” So Elisa took to checking the FSD adoptable dogs webpage several times a day until a career-change dog named Fry appeared in June. Elisa quickly sent his photo to Evan, her brother, and her grandson, all of whom approved of the former service dog who retired after experiencing some health issues.

Within a few days, Fry went home with Elisa and Evan, and soon earned the new name “Coach.” Explains Elisa, “Athletics are a big part of our family, but more importantly, coach is what Fry was trained to do through FSD, and when his service was complete with his former owner, we knew he would be coaching us for years to come.”

Elisa says Coach loves Wilson (they kiss each other each morning), carries a big stuffed bunny in his mouth, and is relearning what cues mean when they come from his new family. He loves walks with Wilson and adores communing with nature from the back deck, where he can watch real bunnies 24/7.

Asked what she would tell someone considering adopting an FSD career-change dog, Elisa says, “Go for it! Both our FSD dogs have been terrific. Sure, there will be adjustments and various investments, just as there are with any family commitment. We’re grateful beyond words for Wilson and Coach!”

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**PUPPY RAISERS NEEDED!**

FSD is seeking dedicated volunteers in the Denver metro area to join our community-based Puppy-Raising Club. You’ll receive special training, ongoing guidance, and support from our staff and fellow puppy raisers, as well as the satisfaction of knowing that you helped a young pup learn, grow, and prepare to meet their full potential. FSD also is in need of volunteers to foster adult dogs on weekends and holidays to give them a break from kennel life.

Learn more at freedomservicedogs.org/volunteer.

**HELP US RAISE THE NEXT GENERATION OF FREEDOM SERVICE DOGS!**
Volunteer Spotlight:
Lori Bowen

BUSY VOLUNTEER SAYS “MY HEART IS FULL”

In just over six years of volunteering at FSD, Lori Bowen has done it all: helped in the kennels, walked dogs, played with dogs, fostered dogs, assisted with dog training, done community outreach, taught volunteer handlers’ classes, and joined FSD’s newly created Volunteer Leadership Committee.

A lifetime dog lover, Lori’s career path took her into the business world, but she never lost her enthusiasm for being near and working with dogs. She started volunteering at FSD in February 2013 and has come to love every aspect of the experience. Says Lori, “I enjoy interacting with the dogs and the trainers. I adore the puppies—seeing them grow, learn, and become service dogs. I absolutely love that some of FSD’s former shelter dogs go on to become service dogs, therapy dogs, or great pets. It’s wonderful that FSD involves Colorado prisons in the dogs’ training; I cannot imagine anything better for an offender than to have a dog in his or her cell, to have a purpose while serving time, and to learn a trade. And finally, there is no greater joy than seeing the positive impact the dogs have on FSD’s clients. The June and December graduations are emotional, impactful, and extremely rewarding. There is so much to like about volunteering at FSD!”

In December 2015, Lori and her husband, Ben, adopted a mixed-breed FSD career-change dog they named Luca who had not passed his medical evaluation due to hip issues. Because Luca was fearful of strangers and tight spaces, they worked tirelessly with him on socialization at home and at dog-friendly stores and malls. Says Lori, “I’ve always wanted to have a ‘library dog’—a dog children can read to—so I took a Denver Pet Partners workshop and shortly thereafter, Luca and I passed our pet therapy team evaluation. Luca, our once timid shelter dog, is now a registered therapy dog! Luca and I spend time at a local library where children struggling with literacy practice reading to a nonjudgmental dog. In addition, we attend de-stress events at college campuses during finals week and at businesses where employees need some stress reduction, and we recently started volunteering at a new hospital in our neighborhood. I am so proud of Luca and just how far he has come. Perhaps Luca wasn’t meant to be a service dog, but he is a fabulous pet and a great therapy dog!”

For anyone looking to give of their own time, Lori has this advice:

“If you love dogs, want to help people, and are looking for a rewarding volunteer experience, I cannot think of a better place than Freedom Service Dogs! Every day I am at FSD, I give some of my time and a piece of my heart. And every day I am at FSD, I come away with much more than I gave, and my heart is full.”

BIG THANKS TO ANNIEMAC HOME MORTGAGE

On May 7, AnnieMac Home Mortgage raised a whopping $38,965 to benefit FSD through their first annual Fetch the Ball Golf Tournament, held in Mount Holly, New Jersey. Aussie and Nimbus, two of our service dogs in training, accompanied FSD staff members to the event, which drew 144 golfers who contributed to the cause. With the proceeds, they are hoping to help two veteran clients be matched with their new service dog partners. We are incredibly grateful to AnnieMac for their generous support of FSD at this event, which truly is helping change two lives with one swing.
Featured Donors: Eddie and Bobbin Holtvluwer

Eddie and Bobbin Holtvluwer have a very personal reason for being major contributors to Freedom Service Dogs: Their son, Michael, is a longtime FSD client, and they have seen the difference that his service dog, Fender, has made in Michael’s life—and the lives of their entire family.

Michael has dystonia, a movement disorder in which muscles in the body contract involuntarily, causing repetitive or twisting movements that can result in pain and make it difficult to perform daily tasks. He has difficulty walking and grasping or picking up items, and primarily uses a wheelchair.

After attending a dystonia conference in Chicago where Eddie and Michael met a participant with a service dog, the family began researching service dog organizations and discovered FSD in their very own city. Michael was matched with Fender, and they graduated as a team in 2012.

Since that time, Michael has become much more self-confident and outgoing, thanks to his partnership with Fender. The big, gentle dog has also made Michael’s life much easier by helping him walk, pushing the handicap button to open doors, picking things up, acting as a brace when Michael wants to stand up, and finding Eddie or Bobbin when he needs them.

According to Eddie, one of the most significant changes is best expressed by Michael himself, who told his father, “You know, Dad, before I had Fender and went to places like the grocery store or Target, people—especially young kids—would stare at me because I walk differently than people without a disability. Now, whenever I go somewhere in public, people look at me and Fender, and they smile!”

For the past nine years, the Holtvluwer family has supported FSD through generous donations, including gifts made through a qualified charitable distribution from Eddie’s 401(k)—a financial strategy that provides a win-win for both the Holtvluwers and FSD.

WAYS TO DONATE: CHARITABLE IRA DISTRIBUTION

You can enjoy tax advantages by donating to a charity such as Freedom Service Dogs through a charitable IRA distribution. This giving option allows individuals age 70 1/2 and older to meet their required minimum distribution and make direct transfers of up to $100,000 per year (and up to $200,000 per year for married couples) from individual retirement accounts to qualified charities without having to count the transfers as income for federal and state tax purposes. You may also be able to make a tax-free transfer from your 401(k) or 403(b) to your IRA, and then make a direct charitable IRA distribution to FSD. Please consult your accountant or financial advisor to learn if this type of gift is right for you.

FSD HAS AN ENDOWMENT!

GENEROUS DONOR GIVES $1.3 MILLION

In late 2018, FSD established our first endowment, thanks to a $1.3 million gift from a very generous donor. As a new component of FSD’s comprehensive fundraising strategy, this endowment represents our commitment to continuing our life-changing work far into the future for generations to come.

You can help ensure FSD’s long-term financial sustainability through "forever" gifts and bequests to the endowment.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HELPING GROW OUR ENDOWMENT OR MAKING A PLANNED GIFT TO FSD

PLEASE CONTACT DIRECTOR OF PHILANTHROPY KAREN AALUND
kaalund@freedomservicedogs.org
303-922-6231 x218
Did you know?
By donating to FSD on a monthly basis, you:

☑ Help fund the most urgent needs of our mission, such as emergency veterinary care for a dog in training, supplements and supplies, or training and support needed by our clients.

☑ Make the most efficient donation to our programs by reducing the costs associated with postage and mailing.

☑ Provide consistent, ongoing support that we can count on.

Becoming a member of the Kibbles Club is easy!

Visit freedomservicedogs.org/donate/kibbles or contact Kate Goble at 303-922-6231 x215 or kgoble@freedomservicedogs.org.