Thanking our Veterans and Helping Them Heal with Free Pet Adoptions

“A dog will see who you really are and soon this companion will help you tear down those walls.” – Sergeant James Garwacki

WHAT: The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that every day, 20 veterans will take their own lives. Post-traumatic stress disorder and other injuries can make reintegrating to civilian life difficult. The power of a pet can help our heroes heal. That’s why the Buckhead Rotary Club is teaming up with the Atlanta Humane Society once again to provide free pet adoptions to veterans through the Pets for Vets program.

“A companion pet can provide the needed calm that assists the veteran’s healing process and help bring them back from a painful combat experience,” said retired Major General David Bockel. “The Pets for Vets program is a tremendous gift of gratitude and hope for our veterans.”

This Veterans Day, talk to one Atlantan about the difference a dog has made in his life.

Staff Sergeant James Garwacki served two tours of duty with the United States Air Force, and after four years of service, he enlisted in the National Guard and remains on active duty. One day, he came into the Atlanta Humane Society and met Rogue, a Catahoula mix, and his life was changed forever.

“In the military, the mentality is to bottle things up, stay strong and put on a good face. If not, you’re perceived as weak. But a dog will see who you really are and soon this companion will help you tear down those walls,” said Garwacki. “Rogue was able to calm me down, especially at night when I would wake up and not know where I was. I’d be able to reach down and pet her and realize I was okay.”

This program provides veterans with the special love and companionship that only a pet can provide, and the understanding and friendship that they deserve.

“Words alone cannot describe the importance of the Pets for Vets program,” said Candace Klein, President of Klein Contracting Corporation and past president of the Buckhead Rotary Club. “The impact is within the connection, companionship, and trust between the veteran and their adopted pet. It can be truly lifesaving.”

“Science and common sense tell us that the human animal bond can be a powerful tool in healing. That’s why programs like Pets for Vets are so important in providing our veterans an opportunity to experience the joy and companionship of a four-legged friend,” said Dr. Maya Gupta, Training Director in the section on Human Animal Interaction for the American Psychological Association.
Digital assets, including photos and videos of James and Rogue, can be found here.

**WHEN:** Veterans Day is Friday, November 11. Media interviews are available at any time.

**WHO:** Spokespeople available for interviews
- Staff Sergeant James Garwacki, Pets for Vets adopter
- Dr. Maya Gupta, Training Director in the section on Human Animal Interaction for the American Psychological Association
- Candace Klein, President of Klein Contracting Corporation and past president of the Buckhead Rotary Club
- Christina Hill, Director of Marketing and Public Relations, Atlanta Humane Society

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