



PRESS RELEASE

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FIVE HEROIC DOGS HONORED WITH 2023 AKC® HUMANE FUND AWARDS FOR CANINE EXCELLENCE (ACE)

Winners featured in broadcast special on ESPN2



New York, N.Y. – The AKC® Humane Fund is proud to announce the winners of the 24th annual *AKC® Humane Fund Awards for Canine Excellence (ACE)*. These awards celebrate five loyal, hard-working dogs that have significantly improved the lives of their owners and communities. The five winners were carefully chosen from a pool of over 600 impressive nominations.

The winners in each category are featured in a special broadcast *AKC HEROES: 2023 AWARDS FOR CANINE EXCELLENCE* which premiered Sunday, December 10th on ESPN2. The special will re-air on Sunday, December 17th at 8pm ET and Sunday, December 31st at 11pm ET.

An award is presented in each of the following five categories: **Exemplary Companion, Search and Rescue, Service Dog, Therapy Dog, and Uniformed Service K-9**. This year's winners range from a Labrador Retriever who is trained to sniff out hidden electronic devices to prove sex offenders and traffickers guilty to a Border Collie who's a fan favorite on and off the football field at New Mexico State University.

"Our canine companions bring meaning to our lives in many ways. The stories we receive are remarkable," said Doug Ljungren, President of the AKC Humane Fund. "The Humane Fund is pleased to share these five inspiring stories that demonstrate the impact these extraordinary dogs have on our lives and communities."

The 2023 AKC Humane Fund Awards for Canine Excellence are proudly sponsored by YuMOVE™, the official joint supplement of the AKC, and Eukanuba™. Each ACE recipient is awarded a donation in their name to a pet-related charity of their choice.

"We're so proud to support the ACE Awards and highlight the incredible work these dogs do for their owners and their communities," said Warren Rickard, YuMOVE™ U.S. General Manager. "Their unwavering dedication to service is a true inspiration."

"As leaders in premium performance nutrition, it is an honor to be a part of the ACE awards, as we believe every dog is capable of exceptional performance," said Brad Wadler, Vice President of Marketing, Eukanuba™. "We're proud to highlight the extraordinary dogs that have significantly improved the lives of their owners and communities."

This year's ACE winners are:

Exemplary Companion Dog: "Wave," a Border Collie owned by Steve Stochaj of Las Cruces, N.M.

Wave, known as "Wave the Wonder Dog" at New Mexico State University, is a campus celebrity. Owned by NMSU School of Electrical & Computer Engineering Department Chair, Steve Stochaj, Wave is tasked with retrieving the kicking tee during NMSU football games. He has grown into a campus and community celebrity and even has thousands of followers on social media. Stochaj also brings Wave to spring and summer practices so he can meet the players and the players can get accustomed to them being around. Wave is not only keeping busy on campus, but he has AKC titles in Agility, Rally, Obedience, Tracking, Trick Dog, Dock Diving, and Canine Good Citizen (CGC). He also is a member of the Mesilla Valley Search & Rescue Organization.

Search and Rescue Dog: "Pocket," a Parson Russell Terrier owned by Jennifer Jordan Hall of Louisville, KY

Ten-year-old Pocket has been doing Search and Rescue work since she was a year old. Pocket's skills not only include tracing missing people but she is also able to identify Native American burial sites. She is trained in Human Remains Detection and has certifications from the International Police Working Dog Association in Search and Rescue Trailing, Water Search, Crime Scene and Land. She has been able to help police officers obtain search warrants and has helped track down missing people from miles away. Pocket and her handler, Jennifer Jordan Hall, have worked with the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma to find 11 bodies buried that were never detected. Pocket also has her AKC Canine Good Citizen (CGC) certification.

Service Dog: "Hank," a German Shepherd Dog owned by Megan Brimmer of Aliquippa, PA.

Hank is a service dog for eight-year-old Harrison, who is autistic. Hank has been with Harrison and his family for over three years through the organization, K9's for Kids. Before Hank, Harrison struggled with many activities like car rides and going to the grocery store. He often would escape the family yard. He simply could not tolerate any change in his routine. Due to him being nonverbal, he would often take out his frustrations physically. With the addition of Hank, he has tamed Harrison's aggressiveness and now has given him more independence. He has helped Harrison tolerate change and has even helped grow Harrison's desire to communicate. Additionally, with Hank, Harrison has a newfound love of the outdoors and enjoys hiking.

Therapy Dog: "Tuffie," a St. Bernard owned by Amy McCarthy of Tulsa, OK.

Tuffie the St. Bernard has been a therapy dog for seven years through Alliance of Therapy Dogs. She's provided support to several organizations across the greater Tulsa area, including assisted living centers and memory units, colleges during exam times, a facility for developmentally disabled children and young adults, the Tulsa City/County Library's Paws for Reading program, Tulsa International Airport's Welcome Waggin' program, the Laura Dester Children's Center in Tulsa and the Champs Foundation in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. She is also a Pink Paws member of the St. Francis Medical Center's therapy dog group, where in June 2022, the hospital was affected by a mass shooting, killing four people. Tuffie was deployed for two days, spending time at the hospital providing hands-on grief counseling.

Uniformed Service K-9: "Queue," a Labrador Retriever handled by Sgt. Michael Rainey of Greenville, S.C.

Queue, along with her handler, Sgt. Michael Rainey, are part of the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force with the Greenville County Sheriff's Office. Queue was donated to the department by Defenders for Children. Queue is an Electronic Detection K9, which means that she sniffs out micro-SD cards, thumb drives, hidden cameras, phones, and computers that might have child abuse and/or child pornography on them in hopes of finding sex offenders, traffickers, and/or child pornographers. Since her placement in 2019, Queue has sniffed out hundreds of electronic devices.

Click [here](#) to learn more about the AKC Humane Fund Awards for Canine Excellence (ACE).

MEDIA NOTE: ACE Winners are available for interviews. Please contact Sarah Bank at 212-696-8253 or sarah.bank@akc.org to schedule an interview or request photos.

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The AKC Humane Fund, Inc. unites animal lovers in promoting the joy and value of responsible pet ownership through education, outreach and grant-making. The Fund provides financial grants to domestic violence shelters and Breed Rescue organizations and awards scholarships to students pursuing professions that strengthen the human-animal bond. The AKC Humane Fund's Awards for Canine Excellence are given each year to promote the important role dogs play in our lives. Contributions to the AKC Humane Fund are fully tax deductible as allowed by law under Section 501(c)(3) of the IRS Code. For more information, visit www.akchumanefund.org.

About the American Kennel Club

Founded in 1884, the American Kennel Club is a not-for-profit organization which maintains the largest registry of purebred dogs in the world and oversees the sport of purebred dogs in the United States. The AKC is dedicated to upholding the integrity of its registry, promoting the sport of purebred dogs and breeding for type and function. Along with its more than 5,000 licensed and member clubs and its affiliated organizations, the AKC advocates for the purebred dog as a family companion, advances canine health and well-being, works to protect the rights of all dog owners and promotes responsible dog ownership. More than 26,000 competitions for AKC-registered purebred and mixed breed dogs are held under AKC rules and regulations each year including conformation, agility, obedience, rally, tracking, herding, lure coursing, coonhound events, hunt tests, field and earthdog tests.

Affiliate AKC organizations include the AKC Humane Fund, AKC Canine Health Foundation, AKC Reunite, the AKC Museum of the Dog, and the AKC Purebred Preservation Bank. For more information, visit www.akc.org.

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