

Student Trains Pup for Partners for Patriots

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STUDENT TRAINS PUP FOR PARTNERS FOR PATRIOTS

This year Katie Ribbens, a senior psychology major, plans to raise, train, and care for a service dog while living and studying on campus.

Ribbens is participating in Partners for Patriots, a nonprofit organization that pairs war veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with trained service animals.

"Approximately 22 veterans with PTSD take their lives every day," she says. "I've seen firsthand how animals can help people. I wanted to explore the possibility of getting involved in Partners for Patriots' mission as a Dordt student."

Over the course of the last year, Ribbens was in regular communication with Vice President for Student Success Robert Taylor regarding what it might look like to train a dog while living on campus.

"Katie has been fantastic to work with," says Taylor. "She is a great communicator and a true partner—always working to balance her goals with university policy. Katie has a heart for people, and it's beautiful to see her combine her interests with acts of service to others."

The effort was so important to Ribbens that, as part of her Kuyper Honors Program contract, she wrote a 60-page training guide to help show that this dog would undergo a rigorous training program to become "a lifesaving apparatus for a veteran someday—not just a dog that is living with me for the fun of it."

Thanks to her diligent work, she has been given permission to train Sierra, a bernedoodle puppy who will reach a maximum weight of 40 pounds, on campus this fall. Ribbens received Sierra this summer, and within two weeks had trained the puppy to follow about a dozen commands.

"I'm exposing her to everything I can, because she's going to need to be ready



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Katie Ribbens first learned how much animals can help people by observing their responses to horse therapy.

CLUB FOR A CAUSE

Not wanting the service dog training to be an isolated venture, Ribbens started the Assistance Animal Club at Dordt. The goal of the club is to educate and raise awareness about mental health and the benefits that service animals can provide. The club has held events, including one where the vice president of Partners for Patriots and a veteran with his service dog came to campus to talk with the club members about why a service dog can be a valuable asset to veterans.

for anything to be thrown at her," says Ribbens.

"What I admire most about Katie starting the Assistance Animal Club is her persistence and dedication to see this project come to fruition," says Dr. Mark Christians, professor of psychology and faculty adviser to the Assistance Animal Club. "Katie is clearly committed to using

her love for animals, specifically dogs, to bring a valuable service to veterans who are dealing with many challenges—spiritually, physically, socially, and psychologically."

Training a puppy will take a considerable amount of her time, but Ribbens is thrilled to have the opportunity to do it.

"I think this is a beautiful picture of how we can use God's creation to help people. It's also a great way to work as Christ's hands and feet in loving my neighbor," she says. "As much as I wanted to do this for so long, I never dreamed that I'd actually be bringing a dog to campus to do a year of college with me. These dogs are lifesavers—or at the very least, they can change lives. I am grateful I get to be part of the process and to witness God working along the way."

LIZ FRISBEE ('23) AND SARAH MOSS ('10)