



# THE QUEST

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024



# OUR MISSION

In April 1995, Wilma Melville and her search dog Murphy were deployed to Oklahoma City to search the rubble of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building after the largest domestic terror attack on American soil. She returned determined to meet America's urgent need for canine disaster search dogs, sparking the inception of SDF and launching our foundation in memory and honor of the lives lost in this tragedy.

Thirty years later, the Search Dog Foundation (SDF) continues to strengthen disaster response in America by rescuing and recruiting dogs and partnering them with firefighters and other first responders to find people buried alive in the wreckage of disasters. We provide highly trained search dogs and ongoing professional training to task forces across the nation at no cost to their department or taxpayers.

To date, SDF has trained over 240 certified teams that have deployed to over 280 disasters and missing person searches. Thanks to mutual aid agreements, teams can deploy nationwide, and some internationally, wherever disasters occur.

# 2023-2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

George Leis, Chair  
Richard Butt, Vice Chair  
Mike Diani, Secretary  
Chris DeVries, Treasurer  
Elena Brokaw  
Robert Harris  
Sydne Levy  
Andrew MacCalla  
Rhett Mauck  
Deborah Whiteley  
Crystal Wyatt

## READY, SET, SCAN!



When you see a QR code in The Quest, use your smart phone camera to scan and learn more.





# AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Over 3,500 individuals, foundations, companies, and groups came together to support our life-saving mission during our 2023-2024 fiscal year. We are grateful for each of your contributions and worked diligently to use every dollar wisely.

## Financial Position September 30, 2024

Total Assets	\$ 40,057,561
Current Assets	\$ 1,808,636
Investments in Endowment	\$ 9,925,007
Investments Operational Reserve	\$ 1,440,576
Fixed Assets	\$ 26,849,924
Other Assets	\$ 33,418
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$ 40,057,561
Total Liabilities	\$ 1,609,151
—Current Liabilities	\$ 703,673
—Long-Term Liabilities	\$ 905,478
Net Assets	\$ 38,448,410

*A healthy endowment supports the stability of our work. Unless otherwise restricted, planned gifts are allocated to our endowment or capital projects as needed. The investment income from our endowed funds is reinvested to facilitate diversified income streams and act as a reserve for our programs if needed.*

## Activities

October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024

Total Public Support and Revenue	\$ 8,650,572
Contributions	\$ 2,211,496
Grants	\$ 2,683,227
Planned Giving Income	\$ 1,390,013
In-Kind Donations	\$ 62,833
Investment Income	\$ 1,947,675
Merchandising Income	\$ 11,220
Other Income	\$ 344,108

*A total of \$164,628 in public support received was restricted by donors for use in future fiscal years.*

Total Operating Expenses	\$ 7,150,620
Program Services (77%)	\$ 5,532,117
General & Administrative (12%)	\$ 853,546
Fundraising (11%)	\$ 764,957
Total Non-Operating Expenses	\$ 1,125,377

Site improvements of our National Training Center and other capital items	\$ 885,377
Principal payments on the note payable for acquisition of the National Training Center's land	\$ 240,000

# CANINE RECRUITMENT

## FINDING THE RIGHT DOGS FOR THE JOB

**325** shelter and rescue groups engaged across 23 states

**43** dogs recruited into search dog training

### Resilience and Hope: The Inspiring Journeys of Max and Chad

The Search Dog Foundation (SDF) often welcomes canine candidates with unknown pasts whose stories are shrouded in the mystery of shelter origins. While medical screenings typically reveal healthy pups, the stories of Max and Chad painted a starkly different picture, a testament to the resilience of the canine spirit.

Max, a sweet, playful Labrador from the Humane Society of Elmore County, Alabama, and Chad, an energetic, cuddly boy from the Hancock County Animal Shelter in Mississippi, arrived at SDF within weeks of each other. Although these dogs came from different backgrounds, routine X-rays revealed they shared something shocking in common: both had been shot before they entered the care of their respective shelters: Max with a pellet gun and Chad with a shotgun. The revelation was heartbreaking but despite their alarming pasts, these two dogs were sweet, friendly, and energetically embracing their new lives. SDF, for its part, vowed to provide them with a safe, loving future.

#### Max: The Natural on the Rubble

Max, with his boundless energy and love for play, quickly won the hearts of his trainers. Described as a “big love bug,” he transitioned seamlessly into the search program. Exhibiting a unique blend of intensity and intelligence, Max also proved to be a natural on the rubble. He worked diligently to learn his emergency stop, heeling, direction control, and agility skills. A quick study, he grasped the diffuse-scent box concept rapidly, paving the way for him to tackle diffuse problems on the rubble and gain invaluable odor experience. His trainers are thrilled to witness his success, exclaiming, “Max is such a cool dog, and we are very excited to watch him progress through the program!”

#### Chad: The Comfort Companion

Chad, a ball of energy with an insatiable love for cuddles, embraced a different path. While initially considered for search work, he demonstrated that his true calling lay elsewhere: as a professional comfort dog. Chad’s affectionate nature and love for snuggling led him to the National Institute for Canine Service



and Training (NICST), the same organization that transformed SDF alum Ryan into a service dog. Chad’s trainers at NICST report that Chad is settling in beautifully, his happy tail wagging endlessly as he adjusts to all his new learning. Chad’s future lies in providing comfort and support to first responders in times of crisis, a role perfectly suited to his gentle, loving nature.





### A Shared Future of Hope

Despite their harrowing pasts, Max and Chad embody resilience and hope not just for themselves but for the countless people they will touch in their respective careers. No matter what path our canine candidates choose, SDF is committed to ensuring every dog who comes through our campus lives their

best life – like Max and Chad – whose stories remind us of the transformative power of second chances and the unwavering spirit of these remarkable dogs.

*Max is sponsored by Cliff and Crystal Wyatt and Steve and Kathleen Davis.*

## OUR LIFETIME CARE PROMISE:

ONCE RESCUED, THEY WILL NEVER NEED TO BE RESCUED AGAIN

**218** dogs started the year in our Lifetime Care Community

**24** dogs placed in new family homes

**22** dogs placed in alternate careers



Interested in adopting one of our Lifetime Care dogs? Scan to learn more!

# CANINE TRAINING

## SETTING THEM UP FOR SUCCESS: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SEARCH DOG-IN-TRAINING

The journey to becoming a certified search dog is a demanding yet rewarding one, filled with a carefully curated blend of skill-building, physical conditioning, and essential downtime. Our Canine Training Team thoughtfully structures each day to nurture each dog's natural abilities, build crucial skills, and ensure their well-being remains paramount.

### 6:30 am: Rise, Refresh, Refuel

The day begins with a quick outdoor potty break, allowing the dogs to take care of business before breakfast. Mealtime is designed to be mentally stimulating, with food presented in puzzle feeders, wobblers, or slow feeders, encouraging dogs to eat at a healthy pace while engaging their minds right from the start.

### Throughout the Day: Laying the Foundation

For our "freshmen" candidates, the focus is on foundational career skills. They participate in approximately four training sessions spread throughout the day centered on the core elements of searching and "capturing engagement."

These sessions are designed to show new dogs to our program that interacting with their handlers is an incredibly fun and rewarding experience, building the crucial bond and motivation needed for successful future partnering.

### Throughout the Day: Building Athleticism

Physical conditioning becomes integral to their routine as the dogs progress to their "sophomore" level. They begin Canimetrics sessions in the gym three times a week, a program designed to enhance their strength, agility, and endurance. On their off days from Canimetrics, treadmill work helps them maintain their fitness levels. In addition to these daily activities, our candidates receive regular and thorough veterinary care to ensure they are always comfortable and in optimal condition to learn.



### Lunchtime Enrichment:

More than just a meal, lunch is an opportunity for sensory and nutritional enrichment, and the dogs enjoy novel food items in a rotation of engaging presentations such as food puzzles, Kongs, “pupscicles,” or frozen frisbees filled with diverse and enticing foods. These options provide mental stimulation and promote good digestive health, including gut-healthy additions like yogurt, stuffed apples, blueberries, and frozen carrots.

### Individualized Downtime:

Recognizing the importance of mental and emotional health, each dog has a personalized decompression plan folded into their day, allowing them to unwind and recharge in a way that suits their individual needs. This might involve a relaxed decompression walk or hike, a playgroup session with a doggy friend, or enjoying unstructured free time in a play yard.

### 5:00 pm – 8:00 pm: Evening Wind Down

Dinner is served to the dogs around 5:00 pm in puzzle feeders or other engaging forms for motivated dogs. Then, they begin their nighttime routine of final potty breaks outside before getting tucked in for the night.



From the first light of dawn to a restful evening, our staff works hard to ensure that each canine candidate's schedule is a dynamic balance of focused learning, engaging exercises, and relaxing decompression, all geared towards preparing them for the vital task of saving lives.

# SEARCH TEAMS

## PASSING THE LEASH IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

While training develops a dog's and handler's capabilities, the true strength of a search team lies in a profound partnership. Beyond assessing skills, our trainers carefully facilitate a pairing process where the dogs ultimately select their human companions. This deliberate approach fosters a lifelong bond rooted in trust, respect, and unwavering loyalty. These thoughtfully matched pairs transcend the role of colleagues, becoming a family united by their shared mission: saving lives.

**69** dogs were supported in our training program throughout the year

**13** search teams paired, growing our national roster to 96 active teams

**8** fire departments received SDF-trained teams

**7** task forces received SDF-trained teams

## ACHIEVING CERTIFICATION TOGETHER

To be eligible for deployment with their task forces, search teams must pass an evaluation every three years to ensure their skills remain sharp. We are so proud of these teams for their hard work and continued dedication to their training.

**11** re-certifications

**14** first-time certifications



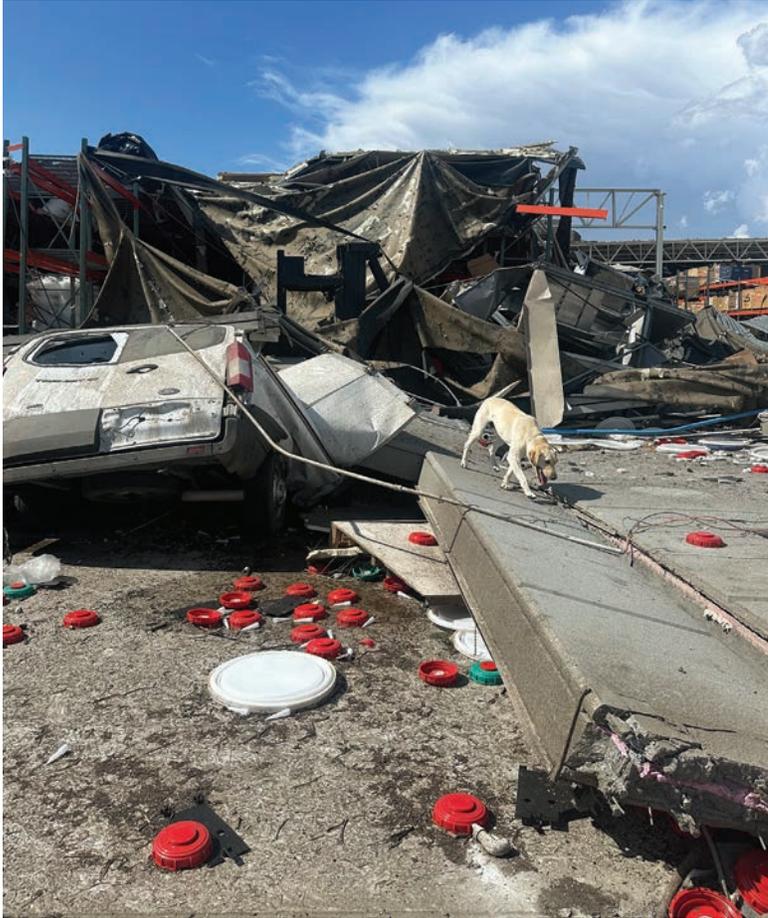
# DEPLOYMENTS

We are deeply grateful for the courageous search teams who responded to numerous major disasters this year. Their bravery and unwavering dedication to helping those in need are truly commendable, and we thank them for their invaluable service.

**16 deployments**

**38 search teams deployed**

**9 states supported in 2 countries**



**1 Explosion**

October 20, 2023 - Cumbres, Mexico  
*Luis Garcia & Montecito, Fidel Gomez & Gemma*

**2 Missing Person**

October 25, 2023 - Ventura, CA  
*Eric Darling & Steven*

**3 Missing Person**

October 27, 2023 - Santa Paula, CA  
*Eric Darling & Steven*

**4 Explosion**

November 2, 2023 - Wappinger Falls, NY  
*Brian Girard & Keila, Greg Gould & Echo*

**5 Missing Person**

January 19, 2024 - Mount Wilson, CA  
*Nick Bartel & Six, Jon Munguia & Clifford, Ed Ruiz & Harper*

**6 Building Collapse**

April 3, 2024 - Dover, NY  
*Adam Leckonby & Luka*

**7 Missing Person**

April 19, 2024 - Nevada County, CA  
*James McCandless & Mac*

**8 Tornado**

April 26, 2024 - Lincoln, NE  
*Adam Schaaf & Dodger, Damon Wirth & Koa*

**9 Tornado**

May 7, 2024 - Barnsdall, OK  
*Justin Montgomery & Stryker*

**10 Missing Person**

May 19, 2024 - Malibu, CA  
*Mark Stevenson & Ruger*

**11 Tornado**

May 22, 2024 - Greenfield, I  
*Laura Denison & Flyer, Scott Hofstetter & Amber, Kevin Tatro & Dempsey*

**12 Building Collapse**

June 18, 2024 - Syracuse, NY  
*Greg Gould & Keila, Adam Leckonby & Luka*

**13 New Mexico Fires**

June 21, 2024 - Albuquerque, NM  
*Nick Bartel & Six, Jon Munguia & Clifford, Ed Ruiz & Harper*

**14 Hurricane Debby**

August 5, 2024 - South Carolina  
*Jeremy DeMott & Chirp*

**15 Missing Person**

September 8, 2024 - Thousand Oaks, CA  
*Eric Darling & Steven*

**16 Hurricane Helene**

September 24, 2024 - South Carolina & Florida  
*Chad Arberg & Cory, Kristi Bartlett & Ivan, Nick Bartel & Six, Mike Bruce & Cooper, Brian Girard & Keila, Carey Jenkins & Nate, Jon Munguia & Clifford, Brandy Outlaw & Pluto, Mike Patterson & Kendri, Brook Rowley & Echo, Billy Walkenhorst & Victor*

# ADVANCED SEARCH TEAM TRAINING

Each year, the Search Dog Foundation is thrilled to open its doors to working dog teams from across the globe, offering an unparalleled training experience. Our campus boasts a range of challenging training props, including extensive rubble and debris fields, a simulated train derailment, a collapsed highway section, and a meticulously crafted disaster zone.

We are constantly evolving our training props to reflect real-world challenges. We look forward to welcoming back familiar faces and introducing new teams to our center, where they can sharpen their skills on the latest deployment simulations and prepare to answer the call when lives are on the line.

**171** working dog teams visited the NTC between October 1, 2023, and September 30, 2024

**40** training events or visits to the NTC, including teams from:

## Urban search and rescue:

- |                              |                          |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Baja California Task Force 3 | Colorado Task Force 1    |
| California Task Force 1      | Kawaii Search and Rescue |
| California Task Force 2      | Nebraska Task Force 1    |
| California Task Force 3      | Nevada Task Force 1      |
| California Task Force 4      | New York Task Force 2    |
| California Task Force 5      | Oklahoma Task Force 1    |
| California Task Force 6      | Utah Task Force 1        |
| California Task Force 7      | Virginia Task Force 2    |
| California Task Force 8      | Washington Task Force 1  |

## Other working disciplines including wilderness search, law enforcement, and home protection:

- California Rescue Dog Association (CARDA)
- Colorado Rapid Avalanche Deployment
- Gold Coast K9
- Heritage Nosework
- K9 Conservationists
- Monterey Bay Search Dogs
- Northwest Disaster Search Dogs
- San Diego Search and Rescue
- Southwest Search Dogs



Interested in training on our campus? Scan to learn more!

# SEARCH TEAM FUND

The Search Team Fund is a financial assistance program offered by SDF to help handlers with out-of-pocket expenses not covered by their task forces or government agencies. In the last few years, we have added more benefits to the program and expanded the scope of eligibility to include all qualifying working dog teams in the United States, regardless of where they were initially trained.

We are proud to be able to help lessen the financial burden on these teams so they can remain focused on what's important: staying deployment-ready to assist communities in need.

**254 working dog teams supported**

**58 working dog organizations served**

*Through the following programs:*

## SEARCH TEAM GRANTS

**185 Search Team grants totaling \$151,452.87**

*used for:*

\$74,529.85 in training travel expenses

\$18,924.86 in training equipment

\$33,509.27 in canine care equipment

\$24,488.89 in veterinary care for non-SDF canines

## CANINE HEALTHCARE FUND

**107 Active and retired search dogs received healthcare services totaling \$274,178.00**

## PETCO LOVE CANINE CANCER FUND

**6 Petco Love Canine Cancer Fund grants totaling \$50,386.38**



If you know of a working dog team that is interested in applying for one of our Search Team Fund programs, scan here to learn more!

Read more about our longtime partnership with Petco Love on page 12.

# CORPORATE PARTNERS

## PETCO LOVE: EASING THE FINANCIAL BURDEN OF CANCER FOR WORKING CANINES



Toby, a vibrant Golden Retriever, is more than just a companion. He's a certified Human Remains Detection dog and an important member of both the National Association for Search and Rescue (NASAR) and the International Police Work Dog Association (IPWDA) whose keen nose has brought solace to families and invaluable assistance to law enforcement.

Toby's passion for his work is unparalleled. He trains multiple times a week and is often found eagerly waiting for his partner, Stephanie, by the back door, ready for the next call to action. Stephanie says that living with Toby is to live with a ball of boundless energy—he's the playful dog who will pull the covers off you in the morning, chase hose water for hours (though he comically despises baths), and then gaze at his handler with eyes full of pure love and admiration.

In early April 2024, Toby and Stephanie's world was shaken when Toby was diagnosed with fibrosarcoma, a type of soft tissue sarcoma that is slow-growing but locally invasive. Early detection and prompt surgery are the key to a good outcome in fibrosarcoma cases, so though the diagnosis hit Stephanie and Toby's entire team hard, Stephanie immediately sought help to give Toby the best chance of living a long, healthy life.

Stephanie applied for financial assistance from the Search Dog Foundation's Petco Love Canine Cancer Fund, which is made possible through SDF's partnership with Petco Love and Blue Buffalo. This fund provides aid to handlers of working dogs in disaster, wilderness, avalanche search, law enforcement, and the military when their canine partners receive a cancer diagnosis. Stephanie was approved for a grant, and Toby received the treatment he needed while continuing to train and respond to searches as his health permitted.

In an email to SDF, Stephanie wrote:

*I can't thank you guys enough!! A weight has been totally lifted off my shoulders. This has been a long process with a lot of emotions and not having to worry about the financial obligations on how to pay for his treatment allows us to solely focus on Toby's needs.*

*Thank you all again!*  
♥ Stephanie and Toby

SDF is deeply grateful to Petco Love, whose generous support extends beyond the Cancer Fund. With over \$3.3 million donated to our operations since 2002, they have been nothing short of a lifeline for countless canines and their handlers.

# CORPORATE PARTNERS

## THE RACHAEL RAY FOUNDATION™



THE  
**RACHAELRAY**  
FOUNDATION

For 15 years, The Rachael Ray Foundation™ has been a dedicated partner in saving canine lives, donating over \$3.2 million to assist SDF in recruiting rescued dogs for our training program, supporting their daily care, and helping them find alternative jobs or loving family homes if a career in disaster search was not their perfect fit. In 2024, they once again lent their support through The Rachael Ray Rescue Brigade campaign, helping SDF raise \$713,503, nearly half of which was provided by The Rachael Ray Foundation.

We are incredibly grateful to The Rachael Ray Foundation and our SDF community members who donated during the campaign and proved there is more than one way to be a hero to rescued dogs!

Stay tuned for the launch of this year's Rachael Ray Rescue Brigade to find out how you can help more shelter dogs become search dogs in 2025!

## VML

VML has been our partner for over two decades, helping us spread the word of SDF's mission to audiences nationwide through ad placements and pro bono campaigns. The most recent campaign, launching in 2023, uses bold copy and striking photography to juxtapose current search dogs with their former lives as shelter dogs. These images accentuate the impact of our mission on both canines and humans by showing that shelter dogs who are often passed over and returned by adopters

have incredible skills and a lifesaving purpose to offer: rescuing people in need.

The assets created by VML's professional team of photographers and copywriters were also provided to SDF and used as cornerstone pieces in our year-end fundraising campaign. We are so grateful to the fantastic team at VML for supporting our work and helping us amplify and advance our mission.



## DID YOU SEE AN SDF AD?

If you see one of our ads in a publication, raise your paw! Many pro bono placements are secured last minute, so we don't always know when they'll run. If you spot one, snap a photo and email us at [Rescue@SearchDogFoundation.org](mailto:Rescue@SearchDogFoundation.org), along with the publication name!

# WAYS TO GIVE

All gifts made to support the Search Dog Foundation's annual, capital, and endowment needs are important and put to good use.

## CASH CONTRIBUTIONS

Always appreciated, gifts of cash are critical to implementing our programs and tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

## GIFTS OF STOCK

If you own appreciated stock, reviewing your investments with a donation strategy in mind is a simple way to give more to the cause you care about and could garner a significant tax savings at the same time.

## MEMORIAL AND HONORARY GIFTS

These thoughtful gifts provide a special way to pay tribute to a friend or family member or to acknowledge a birthday, anniversary, or other significant event.

## MATCHING GIFTS

Many employers offer giving programs that double, or even triple, charitable contributions made by their employees. Check with your employer to see if your company has a matching gift program.

## IRA CHARITABLE ROLLOVER DISTRIBUTION

At 70 ½ years old, you are eligible to rollover your IRA distribution directly to SDF and can use it to satisfy all or part of your required minimum distribution beginning at age 72. Also known as a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD), this transfer generates neither taxable income nor a tax deduction, so you benefit even if you do not itemize your deductions.

## ESTATE GIFTS

The simplest and most popular way to include SDF in your estate plans is through a bequest, designating a specific dollar amount, asset, or percentage of your estate to SDF in your will. You will join over 390 other visionary individuals as an SDF Guardian, ensuring the future legacy of our mission to save lives—both human and canine.

## GIVE WITH CONFIDENCE/SPREAD THE WORD

Did you know that Search Dog Foundation has a four-star rating on Charity Navigator? This means you can have confidence that your contribution will be used effectively to advance our mission. There's also an opportunity to leave a review about our work!



*To learn more about these or other gift opportunities, please contact Director of Philanthropy, Debra Roets, at 888-4K9-HERO x 112.*

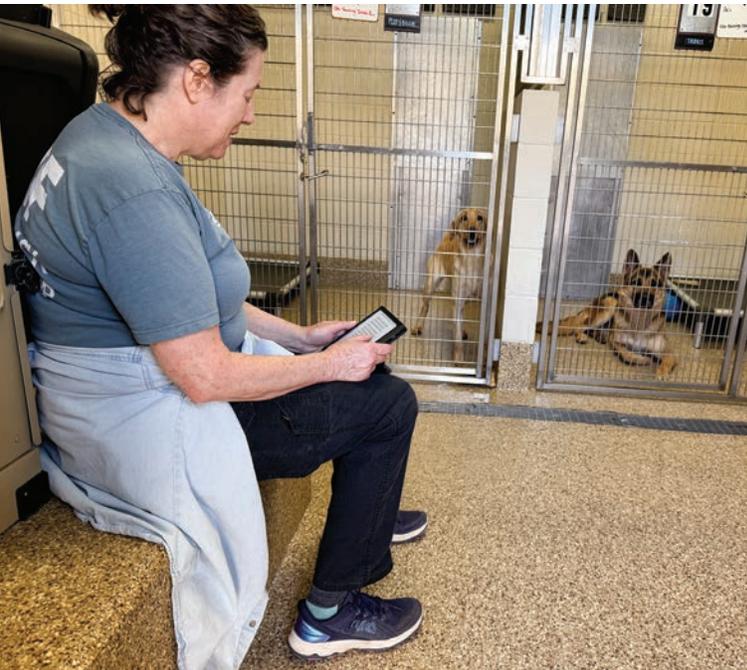


*You can also make a donation through our website!*



# VOLUNTEERS

SDF WOOF PACK — 74 VOLUNTEERS CONTRIBUTED 3,141 HOURS ACROSS 6 STATES



We love our volunteers! Always ready to pitch in with a smile whenever and wherever they're needed, our volunteers are an essential part of SDF's mission, assisting in the following areas:

- Administrative support
- Campus maintenance
- Canine enrichment
- Canine fostering
- Canine recruitment
- Kennel cleaning
- General assistance in the Canine Pavilion
- Photography
- SDF event and tour assistance
- Thank you calls
- Transporting canines
- Vehicle cleaning
- "Victim" for search team training
- *And more!*

The countless hours these volunteers dedicated to supporting our programs in the 2023-2024 fiscal year positively impacted our success, and we thank them for their generosity:

Lucinda Anderson  
Alejandra Avila  
Karen Branch  
Heather Brown  
Georgia Browning  
Janet Chamberlain  
Richa Chaturvedi  
Bennett Collings  
Cole Compton  
Samantha Corona  
Sharon Cromartie  
Trish Deutschmann  
Lori DiBenedetto  
Kevin Donofrio  
Karen Fay  
Joan Field  
Seth Fullerton  
Sue Gary  
Emilie Ghafouri  
Ibby Ghirann  
Joshua Gonzales  
Glen Gorski  
Lisa Hammond  
Marilyn Hilton  
Brad Holt  
Michele Houghtaling

Julianne Huson  
Cory Jacobs  
Sandra Kauffman  
Mary Anne Kendall  
Lauren Klionsky  
Jean Krikorian  
Shari Lee  
Denise Maness  
Liz Martin  
Celeste Matesevac  
Gena Mathwin  
Debi Mauck  
Travis Mauck  
Tucker May  
Mary McNally  
Jenna Melford  
Linda Munday  
Jackie Naster  
Diane Noda  
Stacey Noss  
Pam Nothwang  
Venkata Rao  
Oruganti  
Vinci Parks  
Jessica Pugliese

Abbey Quilter  
Brian Rosenberg  
Sarah Roth  
Donald Schadt  
Megan Schmid  
Zachary Schulte  
Karissa Short  
Patrick Siemon  
Daniel Skall  
Michael Skall  
Michelle Skidmore  
Kayann Stables  
Alicia Stratton  
Christopher Stratford  
Marie Strohman  
Olivia Strohman  
Kendra Tarrer  
Zia Tenderich  
Katie Thompson  
Ryan Tosh  
Stratten Ventrone  
Ivan Vong  
Carol Wan  
Greg West



Interested in  
volunteering with SDF?  
Scan to learn more!

We also thank the pilots from our nonprofit partners Angel Flight West, Angel Flight Central, and Pilots N Paws, who donated 100% of their time, planes, and fuel to transport search candidates from all over the country to our campus in California, and the drivers and owners of Four-Legged Kids Bus who transported search dogs to our training center at a discounted rate.

**From all of us at SDF—staff, board, handlers, and canines—thank you from the bottom of our hearts.  
We're so grateful you're part of the pack!**



6800 Wheeler Canyon Road  
Santa Paula | CA 93060  
888.459.4376  
[www.searchdogfoundation.org](http://www.searchdogfoundation.org)



**Thank you for being  
Part of the Search!**