

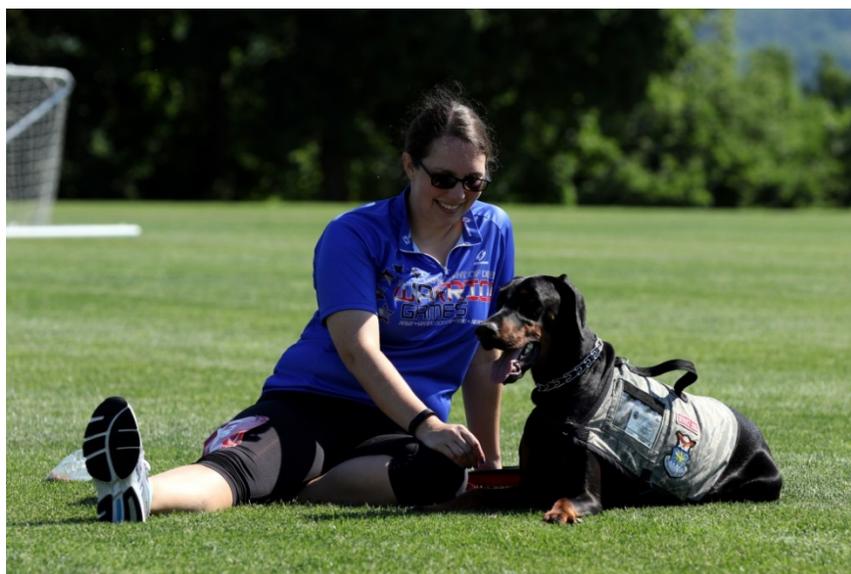


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Service dogs play an essential role for wounded warriors at 2016 DoD Warrior Games



U.S. Air Force Veteran Amanda Frey, a Destin, Florida, native, relaxes with her service dog, Orion, after competing in the women's recumbent cycling race at the 2016 DoD Warrior Games at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York. The Warrior Games is a Paralympic-style adaptive sports competition for wounded, ill and injured service members and veterans. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Joshua Brownlee/Released)

WEST POINT, N.Y. – Visitors here may have noticed an increase in dogs in areas normally considered off-limits. Wounded warriors who participated in the 2016 Department of Defense (DoD) Warrior Games utilized a wide variety of service dogs. From dogs as small as a dachshund to as large as a Doberman pinscher and as unusual as a poodle, these dogs play an essential role in the recovery of our wounded warriors.

“A service dog is a dog trained to do specific tasks for a person that he or she cannot do because of a disability. Service dogs can pick things up, guide a person with vision problems, or help someone who falls or loses balance easily,” according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

For many wounded warriors, these dogs are much more than that.

“He’s been a huge help in my mobility efforts,” said Air Force Veteran Capt. Amanda Frey, talking about her service dog, Orion, a Doberman. Frey, from Destin, Florida, competed in the



cycling and shooting events at the Warrior Games. At the time, she only had Orion for four weeks, but his presence was already a “life change” for Frey.

“He just gives me a peace of mind that I never had before,” she added. “If my husband went to work, he’d be afraid that I’d fall and wouldn’t be able to get up. Now, I know I can get up with Orion to help me.”

Orion is just one example of the many service dogs at the 2016 Warrior Games. These dogs provide stability, guidance and comfort to these wounded warriors before and after their events.

“You have to be in the right place mentally for some of these events, especially like archery, so I can come over and sit down with him, calm down, and help bring that anxiety level down that comes with competition,” said Air Force Veteran Master Sgt. Kyle Burnett, retired veteran from Eagle River, Alaska, about her dog, Moe. She competed in track and field, cycling and archery events at the Warrior Games.

Burnett and Moe, a mixed breed service dog, have been together since Moe was a puppy. Burnett is a certified service dog trainer, studying to become a veterinarian. She explained how Moe helped her during this competition.

“Being at this forum, this type of competition, where people are yelling and there’s lots of noise, he’ll always come and find me, to make sure I’m okay. He instinctively knows what’s going on,” Burnett explained. “It’s always good to see him at the finish line. He’s always the first one I greet.”

Besides providing comfort and stability for these wounded warriors, some service dogs are essential in guiding the veterans around the venues. Air Force Veteran Master Sgt. Reese Hines is blind in his right eye and requires his golden retriever Chase to help him, especially with the large crowds at the Warrior Games. At first, Chase really helped him leave the house and get back to being active again.

“He has needs too and that got me doing more excursions outdoors and being more and more active,” Hines said. “He can also help me go up and down stairs and open doors with handicap buttons. He knows when I’m not feeling good, he’ll come up and nudge my elbow or nudge my hand. It’s just a perfect relationship.”



During the Warrior Games competition, Hines competed and earned gold in what's known as "Ultimate Warrior" events, competing in all the individual events in track and field, archery, cycling, shooting and swimming. Having Chase, helped Hines maintain a routine and levelheadedness.

"It helps keep you balanced, so you don't fall into that downward spiral, worrying about what you're competing in next," he said. "He likes to play, so when I go to the field to train, we get to toss the ball around, so we both get our exercise."

People may wonder if having this many dogs together in one place might cause some problems, but not so for these service dogs. They usually interacted well together and helped other wounded warriors who are without a service dog.

"The dogs really seem to get along, just like we do," Hines said. "They also get to interact with the other service members and provide that same type of therapy we get."

Some dogs were first-timers at the Warrior Games and may not have been prepared for a large event.

"This is his first big event with me, so there are definitely some area for improvement," Frey added about her dog, Orion. "Because of that, we're identifying areas we need to work on like being around loud noises and interacting with other service dogs."

Throughout the entire Warrior Games competition, these service dogs played a vital role in helping these athletes do their best in every event. More importantly, they help them, each and every day, to recover and return to a normal life.