

THE Companion

Issue
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Canine
Companions
SPRING 2026

A YEAR TO REMEMBER

As we reflect on 2025 — a milestone year for our organization — we are deeply grateful for everything our community made possible. Whether you've been part of Canine Companions for decades or recently joined us, your dedication, generosity and steady support continue to move our mission forward.

Together, we achieved meaningful growth this year, including:

- > Merging with Early Alert Canines, enabling us to serve people with insulin-dependent diabetes. Eight individuals will graduate with their medical alert dogs this spring ([page 15](#)).
- > Expanding our therapy dog program to all 50 states and introducing therapy dogs into rehabilitation centers to work alongside our facility dogs ([page 6](#)).
- > Creating our Canine Transport Program, helping more future service dogs begin their journeys with volunteer puppy raisers nationwide ([page 7](#)).
- > Taking our prison puppy raising program nationwide to help address the industry-wide puppy raiser shortage and to reduce wait times for a Canine Companions dog ([page 11](#)).

As we look to the next 50 years, we are optimistic and have a clear understanding of the work ahead. Reaching more people across more communities will require creativity, thoughtful growth and a willingness to explore new approaches.

What will always remain constant is our commitment to quality in our service dogs, programs, and relationships with volunteers, clients and supporters. With your partnership, we will innovate to expand our reach thoughtfully, guided by data, experience and the strength of our community.

Thank you for being part of the Canine Companions family. We look forward to all we can accomplish together in the years ahead.

Kind regards,



Paige Mazzoni
Chief Executive Officer



John Sabo
National Board Chair





Andy's puppy raisers Bill and Barb Bochner, and Amy and Jamy Wheless with future service dog Andy

Puppy Andy Makes His Real-Life Debut!

"Andy: A Dog's Tale," the viral, award-winning animated short film that has captured hearts worldwide, has come to life offscreen as a children's book and now — a real-life puppy!

Named in honor of the film's main character, Andy is an adorable yellow Labrador/Golden Retriever cross who is already living up to his namesake. Andy is learning what it takes to become a service dog. He's attending puppy classes, learning skills like "sit" and "down," and socializing with new people, places, sounds and smells. He's a tangible reminder of the character Andy's story and the Canine Companions mission.

Andy is being raised by longtime puppy raisers Barb and Bill Bochner, and "Andy: A Dog's Tale" film creator and director Jamy Wheless and his wife, Amy Wheless, who illustrated the children's book.

Watch Andy on our social media as he continues to learn and grow in hopes of becoming a life-changing service dog!

For more information, visit canine.org/Andy.



Andy and puppy raiser Jamy attend puppy class.



Make more perfect matches possible with a donation.



Taking the Leap With Luigi



“Patrick’s life can be measured in plateaus and huge leaps,” says Shane, his father. “I can feel that we’re about to take a huge leap now that Luigi is here.”

Born with Down syndrome and autism, 15-year-old Patrick and his family are used to seeing differences in developmental and life milestones. Patrick didn’t learn to walk until age 7, or to communicate with a picture binder until his teens. His disability causes repetitive behaviors known as stimming and even self-harm. Routines are rigid, and he needs near constant supervision.

However, one special service dog, Luigi, is pushing Patrick to engage with his world and prepare for the next “leap” in his independence.

The very first moment Patrick and Luigi met, Patrick leaned in close to Luigi for a hug — a behavior almost unknown to his family.

“Luigi understands the assignment,” says Tiffany, Patrick’s mom. “Pat is his boy, and he sticks by his side whether Patrick is having a hard time with stimming and vocalizing or helping him be calmer when we go out in public.”

Luigi helps Patrick by serving as a focal point in an overstimulating world. With Patrick holding a second leash, Luigi grounds him, reducing some of the chaos Patrick feels in public due his disabilities.

“For the first time, we can go out without Patrick bolting away,” Shane remarks. “We can go to restaurants now, and having the pressure of Luigi against his leg helps regulate Patrick’s nervous system and reduces his extreme rocking, where he can hurt himself.”

Patrick’s parents can see that Luigi has kick-started Patrick’s awareness of his surroundings. He’s starting to engage more in his life. Thanks to Luigi, Shane and Tiffany have hopes for incremental, life-changing, increases in Pat’s independence.

“I’m confident that with Luigi’s help to retrieve items, Patrick will soon understand that he has some control over his life,” Shane comments. “Once Pat connects that he can point to an item of clothing and Luigi will bring it to him... Then Patrick has the autonomy to decide what to wear. There are so many possibilities with Luigi in the picture.”

Advocating with Heart

"Puppy raising is not a solo journey," says Cindy Smiley, a six-time volunteer puppy raiser. "I am a living example of a person who became interested in puppy raising because of the dogs, but who continues to puppy raise because of the people."

Cindy, who has worked as an attorney for 44 years, has a particular passion for the legal side of things – the laws relating to service dogs and other animals in public places.

Partnership with a service dog depends on community members like Cindy, who work alongside service dog providers and their clients while also advocating for service dog rights. Cindy has offered her time to testify on behalf of Canine Companions on legislation in the state of Texas, providing our position on important new bills.

The puppies Cindy raises join her at the Capitol in Austin, keeping the heart of our mission at the forefront when speaking about issues that impact service dogs and their handlers. We're grateful for Cindy's expertise and volunteerism.

If you want to advocate for Canine Companions, register by scanning the QR code, or by visiting canine.org/advocate.



Therapy dog Francisco comforts a patient at the Shepherd Center.

TURNING TO Canines for Healing

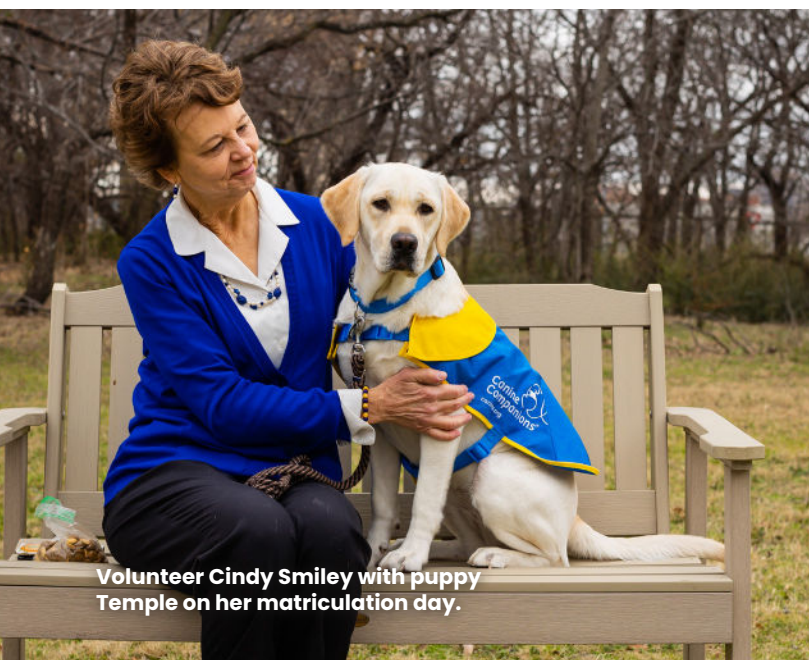
At the Shepherd Center in Atlanta, Georgia, medical professionals help people of all ages recover from catastrophic spinal cord and brain injuries, as well as neurological conditions. The center employs seven full-time facility dogs, each trained in 45 tasks that support physical, occupational, speech and other therapies.

But not every patient requires task-based assistance. "Some just need comfort," says Julie Shepherd, director of founding family relations and canine therapy lead. "That's where therapy dogs like Francisco come in. He wants to greet everyone and snuggle."

Seeing an opportunity to expand support for patients and staff, the center added Canine Companions therapy dogs to its team. These dogs bring joy and connection, offering up to two hours of comforting visits to patients and staff each day.

Together, the Shepherd Center's facility and therapy dogs demonstrate the wide-ranging impact Canine Companions dogs can make, even within the same environment.

Watch more about the Shepherd Center now.



Volunteer Cindy Smiley with puppy Temple on her matriculation day.



There are moments when volunteers are needed on very short notice, sometimes within hours, to care for puppies during a few-hour comfort stop or an overnight stay. Not long ago, that meant one person juggling care for four puppies at once. Today, thanks to the program's growth, a single call for help is met with an outpouring of support, ensuring every puppy is cared for within the hour.

Some dedicated puppy layover volunteers have cared for as many as 30 puppies during short-term stays since joining the program, creating a meaningful and accessible way for community members to support puppies on their journey.

Amy shared, "These short stops are a little piece of the journey that I have the resources to contribute to."

A Loving Layover for Future Service Dogs

Whether it's for just a few hours or an overnight stay, our Canine Transport Program offers volunteers the perfect opportunity to get their puppy fix and play a role in a future service dog's journey without the long-term commitment.

The Puget Sound Field Office in Seattle supports key headquarters operations, including canine travel. SeaTac Airport has become a major hub for transporting puppies to puppy raisers across the country.

Unpredictable weather conditions can lead to puppies' flights being cancelled or delayed, which is when Puget Sound volunteers step in to provide last-minute care during their layovers, which can last anywhere from a few hours to a few nights.

Amy Ng, who prefers to help with the short comfort stops, feels honored to play even a small role in these puppies' big futures, while getting a big reward out of it.

"I love seeing the kindness that comes from these volunteers. There is something about puppies that brings out affection in everyone. That is rare to see," Amy says.



To learn more about the various volunteer opportunities within this program, scan the QR code.



GREATER AWARENESS **THANKS TO A COLD NOSE**

Hayden has always navigated a silent world as someone born profoundly deaf due to Goldenhar Syndrome. For him, being Deaf is simply life as he knows it. But it also means missing everyday sounds that most people who can hear take for granted: a doorbell, a name called from behind, a knock at the door.

As a teen, Hayden's mom noticed that he wasn't aware of how much he was missing. He was dropping items without realizing and leaving the water running. She convinced him to apply for a hearing dog from Canine Companions. When he was matched with his first hearing dog, Remy, Hayden's life opened up in ways he never imagined. After 10 years by his side, Remy retired and Hayden was matched with an intelligent, spirited dog named Abby, who never misses a chance to let Hayden know a sound is happening.

"Having a hearing dog makes a profound difference in my life," Hayden comments. "I used to think I didn't miss much of what was going on around me, but boy, was I wrong."

For Hayden, life is busy! He's married, works in government and lives in a bustling city. As his ears, Abby goes almost everywhere with him. "My wife and I love exploring new places, so Abby is always included when we go out to restaurants or events." Hayden frequently uses the metro and bus, where Abby is an experienced professional.

Thanks to Abby's attentiveness, Hayden doesn't miss sounds like his wife calling his name or visitors knocking on the front door. He also feels more aware on the go – from navigating hectic city streets to flying across the country for the Transplant Games of America, where Hayden competes as a proud kidney transplant recipient and athlete.

"Abby helps me notice the world around me," Hayden shares. "She gives me a level of independence I didn't even realize I was missing."

HAYDEN NAMED NFL STEELERS FAN OF THE YEAR

Hayden was honored as the 2025 NFL Pittsburgh Steelers Fan of the Year after being nominated by a friend for his work in organ transplant awareness.

He became a Steelers fan after his father, who is from Pennsylvania, introduced him to the team when he was young. It has become a lifelong love affair for Hayden. Along with his father and five siblings, He has been a fan of the black and gold – even covering up the walls of his childhood bedroom with Steelers memorabilia.

Hayden was given the chance of a lifetime to meet the Steelers, accompanied by Hearing Dog Abby, and to attend the 2026 Super Bowl.



Future Service Dog Rosen

A Symbol of Gratitude and Hope

For nearly three decades, the partnership between Canine Companions and Rosen Hotels and Resorts has been built on shared values, generosity and a deep commitment to community. The relationship began long before gala lights and ballroom celebrations, rooted in the personal philanthropy of the late Harris Rosen, who supported Canine Companions both personally and through his company.

That legacy continues today through Rosen Hotels and Resorts and its leadership. Frank Santos, a 40-year Rosen veteran and longtime supporter of Canine Companions, has carried forward the spirit of giving through years of service, guidance and generosity. Since 2008, Rosen Shingle Creek has served as the beloved home of the region's annual gala, hosting not only the signature event but countless gatherings supported by financial and in-kind contributions.

To honor this extraordinary partnership, Canine Companions named a future service dog Rosen, a living symbol of gratitude, legacy and hope.



Frank Santos, Rosen Hotels Leadership and Canine Companions Supporter



See our newest graduate teams in our online yearbook.

Staff Updates



We're excited to welcome **Rick Burkett** as **Senior Vice President of Technology**. Rick joins us from Marin Humane and brings experience from Sonoma State University and government agencies. He blends mission-focused thinking with strong technical strategy and team support. We look forward to his innovative leadership for our evolving technology needs.



Rudy J. Breedy has joined Canine Companions as **Northeast Region executive director**. With over 25 years in philanthropy, he brings experience from SUNY Ulster, Nassau Community College Foundation, and major nonprofits, including March of Dimes, Red Cross, Arthritis Foundation, American Heart Association, and Boys and Girls Club. We're thrilled to welcome him to the team.



UCLA BRUINS WELCOME PAULEY

Alongside puppy raisers Audrey and Kyubin, members of the UCLA Collar Scholars, future service dog Pauley was invited onto his namesake Pauley Pavilion court during the Bruins' Big Ten Conference home opener vs. Oregon. Pauley became a VIP on the UCLA women's basketball court in October, spending the fall visiting the team after practices and first appeared as a special guest at a game in December. Follow Pauley on our social media for more updates!

SPONSOR A FUTURE HERO TODAY!

Canine Companions puppies Berkley and Barley need your sponsorship! For \$20/mo for one year or one \$240 gift, you'll support their journey from playful pup to service dog and receive a sponsorship kit, email updates and adorable puppy photos.



Scan the QR code to sponsor now!



Helping Others Through Puppy Raising

When Christi Scott Bartman learned that the North Central Region was partnering with Southeastern Correctional Institution (SCI) to launch a Prison Puppy Raising Program, she knew she was meant to help.

As an adjunct professor at The Ohio State University and the founder of an organization that assists survivors of human trafficking, the opportunity aligned with her passion for giving back to those most vulnerable.

Along with being a volunteer puppy raiser herself, Christi began assisting with puppy classes at the prison in Lancaster, Ohio, training incarcerated handlers to raise future service dog puppies.

“Sometimes I’m an instructor and sometimes I’m a cheerleader,” Christi says. “I get to see the sheer joy that dog has created in their life.”

Since the program launched in 2024, Christi has seen the incarcerated handlers bond with the dogs and develop a knack for helping others through puppy raising.

“They’ve told me, ‘Some of us have children, but we can’t see them and we can’t hold them. This

gives us something to care about and care for,’” she remarks.

Now, Christi is co-raising puppy Kipper with a handler at SCI in a partnership that she says is especially great for the dogs involved.

Between months with his handler following the routine at the prison, Kipper spends periods of time at Christi’s home, continuing his training and socializing in ways he’s unable to at SCI, such as visiting shopping centers and local trails.

The program’s first two puppies raised at SCI, Mojo and Lancaster, matriculated in November 2025 and are now in professional training.

Christi says she looks forward to seeing the partnership continue to grow, impacting both the handlers and the people their dogs are being trained to help.

“It’s just such a win-win,” Christi says. “Truly everybody benefits.”

Learn more about becoming a puppy raiser at canine.org/raise.





Bread Financial supports Canine Companions during National Service Dog Month.

Changing Lives Together With bread financial[®]

For 50 years, Canine Companions has helped people across the country experience greater independence, confidence and connection through expertly trained service dogs. Today, that impact is made possible through Bread Financial's support as a national partner, helping advance our mission in meaningful and lasting ways.

In honor of Canine Companions' 50th anniversary, Bread Financial made a generous \$500,000 gift, reinforcing their belief in expanding opportunities for people with disabilities to live more independent lives.

Their partnership extends well beyond financial support. Bread Financial sponsors Team Training classes at all Canine Companions training centers, directly supporting the moment when recipients and service dogs begin their journey together. Bread Financial associates also volunteer their time on campuses, assisting with meals and special activities, and helping create a welcoming environment for clients, staff and volunteers alike.

This milestone year was celebrated through memorable moments that brought our missions together — including a special activation with the NHL's Columbus Blue Jackets and celebrations across Bread Financial offices nationwide. These moments highlighted the powerful connections formed through service dogs and the pride Bread Financial associates feel in supporting our life-changing work.

At its heart, Bread Financial's support reflects their broader commitment to thriving communities — investing in people, empowering independence, and championing inclusion both inside and outside their walls. Their partnership helps build a world where people with disabilities are not just supported but celebrated.

Canine Companions is deeply grateful for Bread Financial's continued partnership, generosity and shared belief in creating opportunities that change lives — today and for generations to come.

Supporting Lifelong Service Dog Care with



Canine Companions is proud to partner nationally with VCA Animal Hospitals, whose expertise and dedication help support the health and well-being of Canine Companions dogs from birth until retirement. From breeder dogs and puppies in training, to working service and facility dogs, VCA ensures our working dogs and pets receive compassionate, high-quality veterinary care at a discounted cost.

As a trusted veterinary partner, VCA supports the Canine Companions community with consistent care that helps our dogs stay healthy, comfortable and ready to do the life-changing work they are trained to perform. Their broad network of hospitals and experienced veterinary teams provide peace of mind to staff, volunteers and recipients, knowing our dogs are supported by professionals who understand their unique needs.

VCA's partnership helps strengthen the foundation of care behind every service dog team. We are grateful for their commitment to the dogs at the heart of our mission and the lives they help transform every day.

Learn more about partnerships at canine.org/partners.



JOIN US AT DOGFEST
Support our mission or volunteer for a tail-wagging good time at DogFest! Find an event near you at canine.org/dogfest.
Presented by **Eukanuba™** **2026**



Three Times the Independence

Growing up with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), a progressive muscle-wasting disorder, Dayna was 13 before she could get her dropped hairbrush from the floor without asking her parents for assistance, thanks to a special dog named Orienne.

“My SMA makes my muscles really weak, and they don’t work the way they do for people without SMA,” Dayna says. “I drop everything. I use a power wheelchair full-time, and I really need help with everything.”

Dayna’s parents were responsible for handling Orienne, but she helped Dayna be more independent than ever. “Asking a human for help is different than asking a service dog.”

When Dayna was in her twenties, she received Service Dog Sender, who faithfully assisted Dayna wherever the pair went. Sender even gave Dayna the confidence to get her first job in customer service — first in an office, and later as a remote role that would require her to be home alone all day.

“Sender made it possible,” Dayna recalls. “She could open and close doors and retrieve anything I needed. I didn’t need my parents to come home from their busy days at work.”

When Sender retired, it was hard for Dayna to consider getting another service dog. Eventually, she came to an important realization: how could she not?

“I knew Matteo was a perfect fit from the first meeting at Team Training,” says Dayna. “He seemed so attuned to me. Now, he always wants to be with me, ready to pick up my pill bottles and hair ties, or tug the front door closed. His face brightens my day.”

Matteo’s help extends beyond his love of picking up items — Dayna’s mood has changed too.

“When I’m in public, I just feel calmer now because Matteo is calm,” she explains. “All of my service dogs have given me a reason to get up in the morning. I can’t imagine life without a service dog!”

MEDICAL ALERT DOG GRADUATES TAKE CENTER STAGE

Canine Companions will celebrate eight new medical alert dog graduates this April. This milestone comes just months after merging with Early Alert Canines and expanding our services to assist individuals with insulin-dependent diabetes. Medical alert dogs help their handlers navigate life with diabetes more confidently.

Low blood sugar is a severe side effect of insulin therapy that can lead to serious medical issues, including coma or death. Canine Companions medical alert dogs are trained to remain continuously vigilant for their partners, providing timely warnings about dangerous changes in blood sugar levels.

“Graduating with a medical alert dog marks a milestone far greater than the completion of training – it represents the beginning of a partnership built on trust, safety and independence,” says Carol Edwards, executive director of the Medical Alert Dog Program. “These teams step forward ready to navigate life with confidence and a newfound peace of mind.”

Join us for graduation on April 18, at 2727 Parkside Cir, Concord, California, 94519. Learn more about medical alert dogs at canine.org/medicalalert.



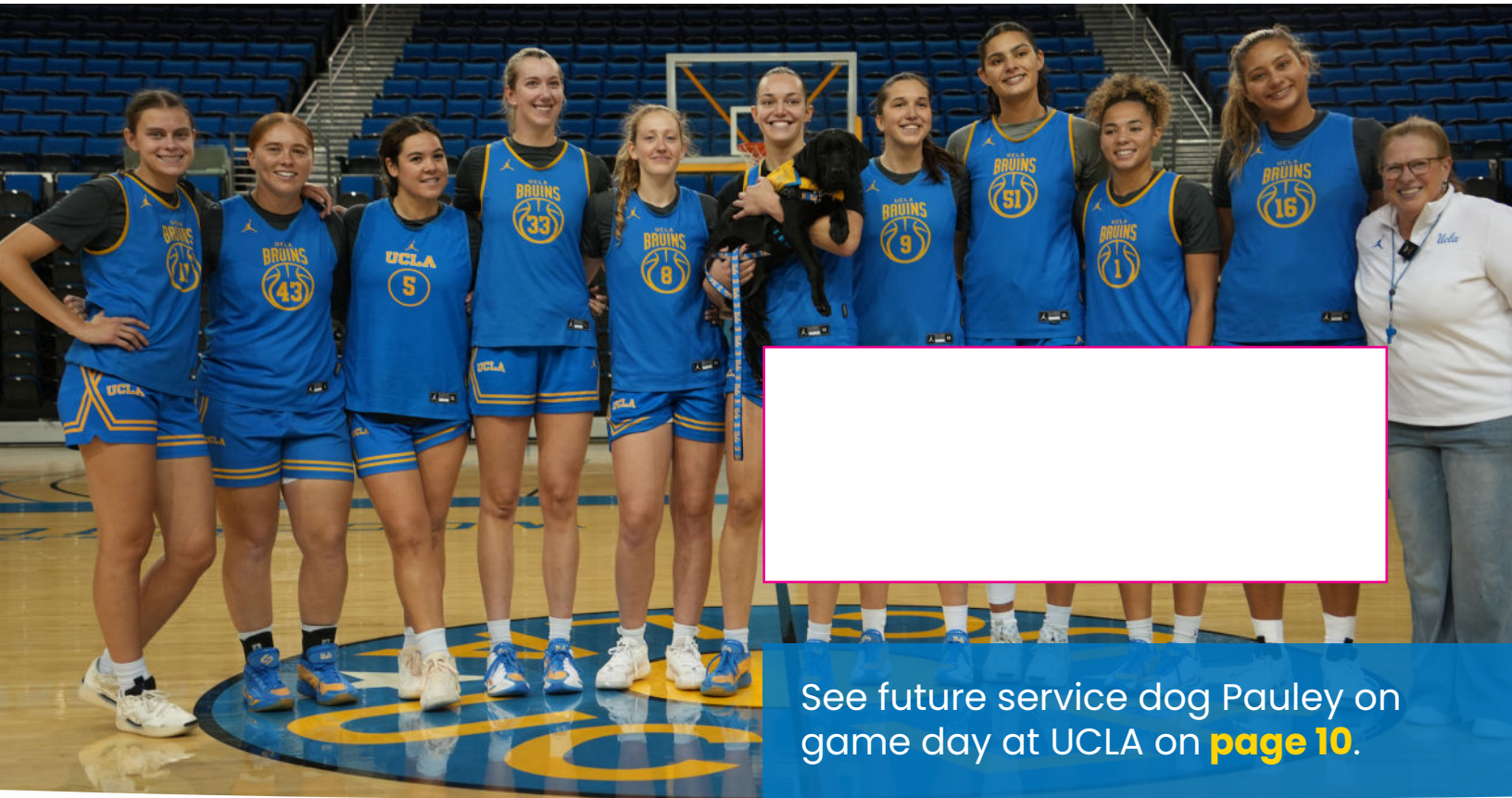
EVENTS

Sit. Stay. Sparkle.™	April 11 – Dallas, TX
Medical Alert Dog Graduation	April 18 – Concord, CA
National Graduation Day	May 15
Sit. Stay. Sparkle.	June 4 – New Albany, OH
Sit. Stay. Sparkle.	June 6 – Newport Beach, CA
Sit. Stay. Sparkle.	June 13 – Santa Rosa, CA
Sit. Stay. Sparkle.	June 25 – Great Neck, NY
National Graduation Day	August 14
North Texas Giving Day	September 17 – Online
Sit. Stay. Sparkle.	October 24 – Orlando, FL
Sit. Stay. Sparkle.	October 30 – Seattle, WA
Salute Independence	November 4 – Bay Shore, NY
National Graduation Day	November 6



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See future service dog Pauley on game day at UCLA on **page 10**.

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