

Veteran and Canine Companion Inspire by Example

'Sometimes it's hard for veterans to find their place in the civilian world and in a way, Roty has helped me rejoin society and allowed me to serve my community'

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As an Army Military Police Officer, Brett Hurlburt helped decrease human and munition trafficking in Kosovo. Later in Iraq, he worked to restore local police forces in Baghdad and minimize the impact of insurgents throughout the area.

Hurlburt medically retired in 2008 and lives in Liverpool, New York. Earlier this year, he connected with Clear Path for Veterans, describing it as an “awesome, welcoming organization that provides several free services to veterans and their families.”

In June, he was accepted into Clear Path's Canine Program and was matched with Rotary, Roty for short, a Psychological Service Dog (PSD) in training.

Hurlburt works in utility construction. Roty helps him stay present so he can perform his job well and safely. Roty lends support outside of work also.

“I volunteer at a local horse rescue that rehabs and adopts out former racehorses,” he said. “Roty helps me focus and brings me the confidence I need to serve my community.”

Just months after being partnered with Roty, Hurlburt discovered and appreciates the impact the dog has made.

“Sometimes it's hard for veterans to find their place in the civilian world. In a way, Roty has helped me rejoin society and allowed me to serve my community,” he said. “It took me a long time to get the support I needed. I encourage others to find what will help them because it can be life changing.”

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With a service dog in tow, Hurlburt almost has become an advertisement for finding that support. Although the attention can be uncomfortable, he focuses on the positive.

“While it helps me, living with a service dog can be difficult because of the questions or looks I get,” he said. “But when a fellow veteran comes up and asks about Roty and then walks away believing they could benefit from such a partnership, it makes it worth it.”

Additionally, for Hurlburt the attention sheds light on an important topic he is happy to see addressed.

“I chose to be partnered with a PSD because not all of our scars are obvious. This makes my invisible injuries visible, allowing people to see what is usually unseen. It opens a dialog about Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS) and other service-related injuries, he explained.

“So, while the service dog is for me, Roty allows me to speak with other veterans about the resources available to them. It shows those living with PTS what’s possible,” he said. “By being vulnerable enough to ask for help, I hope I’m helping other veterans too.”