



# DOGS

*Efforts to make America more pet-friendly are gaining momentum.*  
By Jen Reeder

When Theresa Piasta served in the U.S. Army, she deployed to Iraq for 14 months. While there, she was promoted to Captain and was awarded a Bronze Star for her service. But she also developed chronic pain and post-traumatic stress disorder, which affected her transition back to civilian life.

Fortunately, Piasta and her husband decided to bring home a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel mix named Waffles. Piasta quickly bonded with the little fluffy dog and credits the pup with helping her cope

with PTSD.

“I was really ill a year ago and every day she’d get me outside connecting with our neighbors in a positive way,” Piasta says. “She’s my angel.”

Because of her relationship with Waffles, Piasta wants to leverage technology to make the world more dog-friendly. She developed an app called Puppy Mama in which users rate businesses on their pet-friendliness. She believes if businesses—from restaurants and hotels to airlines and employers—see there’s a financial benefit to welcoming well-be-

haved dogs, the trend will continue to grow. Her latest project, Pawssion, seeks to create a coalition of pet-friendly businesses.

“More voices are better than one when it comes to advocating with the government and with businesses for showing that this is what their people want,” she says. “People love dogs and they treat them as family members.”

# Allowed

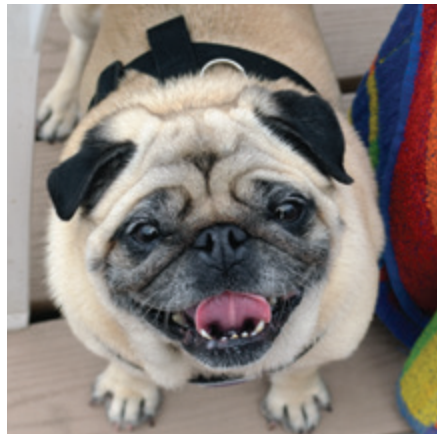


LEFT: AMBER MAE BAILEY PHOTOGRAPHY; RIGHT: COURTESY SUBJECT



Clearly, she's not alone. A 2017 report by the National Association of REALTORS found 95 percent of animal owners believe it is important that a housing community allow animals, and representatives from 81 percent of U.S. households said animal-related considerations will play a role in deciding on their next living situation. A full 99 percent of pet owners surveyed said they feel their animal is part of the family.

Spending reflects that close bond: Americans spent \$66.75 billion—yes, billion!—on pets in 2016, according to the American Pet



Products Association. At time of writing, 2017 expenditures were on track to reach \$69.36 billion. Savvy rental agencies, businesses, and workplaces are taking note, but there's a long way to go before our dogs are permitted to go virtually everywhere with us. That's one reason the nonprofit Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) has funded nearly \$2 million in scientific research into the health benefits of pet ownership and human-animal interaction.

HABRI Executive Director Steven Feld-

man—whose 8-year-old dog Scout accompanies his family to the local coffee shop and children's daycare center—says the organization advocates for pet-friendly policies because pets are an essential element of human wellness. The group's online database, HABRI Central, archives over 28,000 entries on the human-animal bond.

“As studies continue to show that pets enrich our lives and help keep us healthy, more aspects of daily life will include pets, from businesses to workplaces, hospitals, schools, nursing homes, and more,” he says, noting, “Research demonstrates that pet owners are less likely to be obese, more likely to meet physical activity guidelines, have a reduced risk of heart disease, are more likely to be socially connected, and are happier than non-pet owners.”

HABRI's 2016 survey of pet owners found that 87 percent of pet owners would be more likely to buy products from pet-friendly businesses. Upon learning about the health benefits of pets, 62 percent of pet owners said they'd be more likely to bring their pet when they go out and when they travel.

“These statistics provide evidence that businesses can attract more pet-owning customers if they have pet-friendly policies,” Feldman says.

Businesses can also benefit from allowing employees to bring their dogs to the workplace. For the past 20 years, employers have

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had a chance to see what a pet-friendly office is like thanks to Take Your Dog to Work Day, founded by Pet Sitters International (PSI) and celebrated each year on the Friday after Father's Day.

Beth Stultz, vice-president of marketing and operations for PSI, said dogs in the workplace can reduce stress while boosting employee interactions, activity, and even creativity.

“Employees see it as a benefit, so for businesses and managers it really becomes a way to show their employees that they care about them and their lives,” she says.

While positive results from Take Your Dog to Work Day can potentially lead to year-round policy changes and open-mindedness about pet-friendly policies in other public places, she cautioned that dog lovers are responsible for ensuring that success.

“Make sure your dog is ready to interact

with other dogs and other people before you bring him to work, because you may not get another chance to make a good first impression,” she advises. “If the dog is fearful of strangers or doesn’t have the best manners quite yet, work with a trainer.”

Mary Burch, Ph.D, director of the AKC’s Canine Good Citizen (CGC) program, says CGC training is a great way to prepare dogs for interacting with the public in pet-friendly businesses. The program teaches dogs to be well-mannered in the presence of other animals and people.



## Think twice before buying a fake service dog vest

Buying a phony service-dog vest for a pet and posing as a person with a disability is not only unethical, it hurts the movement to make society more pet-friendly. In response to ill-mannered “service dogs” in restaurants, an Arizona lawmaker even introduced a bill to allow restaurants to ban service dogs (he later voted against his own legislation after an outcry from people with disabilities). Still, many people pretend to have service dogs because they want to be able to take their dog everywhere. Courtney Simmons, who has a cardiac alert dog named Zido (right), said the rise of fraudulent service dogs is a serious issue that has made businesses question whether her service dog is legitimate. She had to leave a restaurant after waitstaff told her the Labrador Retriever couldn’t accompany her to the buffet—even though she’s entitled to under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

“I’ve had people ask me how they can get a vest like that for their dog,” she says. “I have to explain to them that what they are asking is actually a crime. You can’t fake a service dog. In the eyes of the law, and in the eyes of those of us who have service dogs, they are a piece of medical equipment. They just happen to be a piece of medical equipment that has fur and is really cute, and can breathe and move on its own. I often have to tell people, ‘Would you ever ask somebody if you could try out their wheelchair?’”

James A. Kutsch, Jr., Ph.D, president and chief executive officer of the nonprofit guide dog school The Seeing Eye, is blind and travels the world with his service dog, Vegas, a German Shepherd Dog.

“Any poorly trained or poorly controlled dog can interfere



with the effective use of service animals and can jeopardize the safety of both the disabled handler and the service dog,” he says. “Further, attitudes towards legitimate service dog users with well-trained, well-behaved dogs often are negatively influenced by prior experiences with poorly behaved dogs.”

Mary Burch, Ph.D., director of the AKC’s Canine Good Citizen (CGC) program, adds that CGC dogs should not be passed off as service dogs or emotional support animals.

“To do this is unethical,” she warns.

The bottom line: train your dog and play by the rules. It’s the best way to help America become more dog-friendly.

“The AKC’s Canine Good Citizen program is recognized as the gold standard of behavior for dogs in our communities,” she says. “CGC skills such as accepting a friendly stranger and sitting politely for petting provide the foundation for friendly interactions with people the dog meets in public settings.”

Burch notes that it’s important to make sure that your dog is not only well-behaved, but also comfortable in community situations. Early socialization—systematically exposing dogs to new people, places, and things—is the key, she says. Especially with puppies or a dog you’re just beginning to take into public places, watch for signs of stress, such as wide eyes with the whites showing, ears back, licking their lips and/or nose, sneezing, excessive shedding, tense muscles, being clingy, shaking (appearing to shiver), and yawning, she advises.

“Responsible dog owners will do everything they can to ensure that their dogs feel safe and secure,” she says. “If someone or something is upsetting your dog in the community, do your best to analyze why the dog is afraid. It may be that additional socialization or training is needed, or if the dog is having a consistent fearful reaction, a behavioral intervention (such as systematic desensitization) is needed.”

Ultimately, making sure our dogs thrive in public is in the best interest of promoting a pet-friendly society—and strengthens the bond we share with our beloved dogs. **FD**