

January 2019 Caregiver of the Month: Janice Ferrel!



Janice, a native Missourian, has been working with service dogs for many years. She began going to the Missouri Veterans Home in her hometown of Warrensburg with her mini dachshund, Heidi. Janice and Heidi would visit with the veterans while Janice's husband played cards with the men. This continued for five to six years until the death of Heidi. Shortly after, a woman who had seen Janice and Heidi at the Veterans Home approached Janice and offered to give her Bo, a golden retriever, with the understanding that Bo would be used in the same manner as Heidi – to bring joy to the veterans of the home. Despite losing her husband in June, 2017, Janice and her dog, Bo, have been providing social support through caregiving to veterans of the Missouri Veterans Home in Warrensburg for three years.

“Let me start by saying the mold was broke the day Janice was made,” said Curt Jenkins, a veteran at the home in Warrensburg. “She’s instrumental in the well-being of us all. I see her love pour out always. It’s like she is the chosen one by God to help our days. It gets us off of the ‘Why me?’ mentality because she always puts others before herself.”

Janice also visits other homes in town and conducts private visits for those in need of companionship and caregiving. Janice does not hesitate to provide additional time to individuals if they are in need.

“Janice is either an extension of Bo, or he is of her. It’s not only the dog the veterans have come to love, but it’s Janice as well,” said Curt.

Janice has lived in town her entire life. When she takes Curt and Bo on an outing into the community, lots of folks say, “Hi Janice. Hi Bo. What’s going on?” Curt added, “I feel like a part of the community. Janice is a very strong-willed woman. Even through the loss of her husband, she goes forward and continues to be strong.”

When asked what her favorite hobbies are, Janice said without hesitation, “Traveling with and taking care of Bo is what I love to do. I get as much from it as Bo and the veterans do!”

Janice has learned through her emotional caregiving that the veterans love seeing her as much as they enjoy seeing Bo. “I wish more people would realize what pet therapy does for these folks,” she said. “The veterans adore seeing dogs come to visit.”

Janice’s advice for anyone wanting to provide caregiving through emotional support using a therapy pet is simple, “You have to love people and be able to interact with them. And you gotta love to talk!”