



SAINT FRANCIS
SERVICE DOGS

Carol Willoughby,
Co-Founder
Saint Francis Service Dogs



Carol Willoughby became an advocate for people with disabilities in the early 1970's after being diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis at age 22.

Her first service dog, a privately-trained golden retriever named Booker, came into her life in 1986. Booker restored her dwindling self-confidence, assisted with daily tasks, provided her husband with peace of mind, and helped raise two sons. The difference Booker made in Carol's life inspired her to establish the non-profit Saint Francis Service Dogs at her kitchen table in 1996. She served as executive director in a volunteer capacity for 5 years, until the organization could hire paid staff and raise enough money to buy land for a training facility.

She received state and national awards from the Arthritis Foundation, a national award from the Delta Society, and the Woman of Achievement Award from the YWCA of the Roanoke Valley.

Although Booker died just 3 days prior to the grand opening celebration of Saint Francis Service Dogs, he received a posthumous award at Virginia Tech and became the namesake of the annual award honoring exceptional service dog teams. The Booker Willoughby Service Dog of the Year Award has been presented every spring since 1997 by Omega Tau Sigma Veterinary Fraternity and The Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine. Booker's portrait hangs in the lobby of the veterinary teaching hospital, where he continues to increase awareness of the Human-Animal Bond and the important work of service dogs.

Carol also enjoyed writing short stories and articles. Her story, "Amanda's Triumphant March," is featured in *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Children with Special Needs*. She lived in Roanoke, Virginia with her husband and best friend of forty years, Doug Willoughby, and her service dog Midas. Carol passed away in November, 2015. She is missed daily and deeply.

Learn more about Carol Willoughby...

[Tribute: The Roanoke Times](#)

[Tribute: WSL 10](#)