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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Saint Francis Service Dogs Celebrates our 2022 Graduating Class

Roanoke, VA – October 14, 2022, - Saint Francis Service Dogs is celebrating our new class of partner teams with a special premier streaming event this Sunday, October 16<sup>th</sup>, at 7pm here:

**[www.saintfrancisdogs.org/grad22](http://www.saintfrancisdogs.org/grad22)**

This year, five new partner teams join the Saint Francis Family. It takes years of hard work from both our partners and dogs, along with our staff, trainers and volunteers to arrive at this momentous occasion, Graduation Day! Thank you to our generous sponsors of Graduation 2022, our numerous faithful donors, and so many others for helping make this event possible.

For our dogs, it starts in puppyhood and lasts two years or more. All of our dogs are trained to complete over 40 tasks to assist their partners in activities of daily living or to serve the needs of many in a facility setting. As part of their journey, our partners undergo a rigorous application and screening process before beginning their training to learn the physical and emotional requirements of partnership with a Saint Francis Service Dog. Meanwhile, our expert trainers and staff are evaluating the strengths of the dogs in the program and determining the specific needs of each person or facility waiting to be matched. Once a match is made, that new team enters Team Training where our trainers tailor any commands and skills that will serve that individual person or facility best once they complete their training.

**Executive Director Cabell Youell says, “Years of work culminate in this moment when we get to celebrate these extraordinary teams. Watching them go out into the world together is an amazing privilege.”**

On top of the physical assistance that improves the lives of our partners, the partnership with a Saint Francis Service Dog has an undeniable emotional impact as well. These dogs become a best friend and bridge to the world. **Graduate Blair says of her service dog Koa, “Koa has become an extension of me. She is my number one companion.”**

These life-changing partnerships would not be possible without the generosity of our volunteers, donors, and grantors. Because of their support, Saint Francis is able to provide these exceptional service dogs, along with training and lifetime support, to our extraordinary partners at no cost to them.

Please join us to hear the amazing stories of all of our new teams on Sunday, October 16<sup>th</sup> at 7pm here:

**[www.saintfrancisdogs.org/grad22](http://www.saintfrancisdogs.org/grad22)**



Saint Francis Partner, Blair, and her service dog, Koa – Class of 2022 Graduates

### **About Saint Francis Service Dogs:**

Saint Francis Service Dogs is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to assist children and adults with disabilities to become more independent and self-sufficient through partnership with a professionally trained service dog.

Since our inception in 1996, we have matched 167 service and facility dogs to assist people with a wide range of disabilities, including autism, cerebral palsy, joint and/or muscular diseases, multiple sclerosis, brain injury, paralysis, Parkinson's disease, rheumatoid arthritis, and many other conditions.

Our service dogs are trained in over 40 different skills, and can assist a person with physical task-work such as turning lights on and off, retrieving fallen items, carrying items and going for help when necessary.

In addition to the tangible services that service dogs provide, the animal-human bond generates a strong emotional attachment between human and dog. Through this bond, the person often develops a positive focus and a stimulus to be active. The result is increased motivation, higher self-esteem, and a greater sense of belonging, as well as more social interaction and a higher quality of life. A service dog can act as a bridge to the world around them, steering the focus to the person and away from the disability.

It takes two years and costs tens of thousands of dollars to train one Saint Francis Service Dog. We absorb this cost and do not charge our partners for their dogs. We rely on generous individuals, corporations, and foundations to fulfill our mission. Because of their support, we are able to engage, empower, and transform the lives of people with disabilities. With your help, we can change lives for a lifetime. *One dog, one person, one family, one community at a time.*