

All Days are Dog Days at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Kevin Bradley and his service dog Sage at the 32nd NVWG. [More photos from the Games.](#)

No [National Veterans Wheelchair Games](#) (NVWG) would be quite the same if service dogs were not part of the scene.

Because service dogs play such an important role in the lives of injured veterans, when those veterans come together, the dogs come along, too. While the dogs serve many practical purposes in terms of doing functional tasks for their human companions, they also play another role.

“He’s a chick magnet,” said Air Force veteran Kevin Bradley with a grin about his dog Sage. Then Bradley got serious. “He’s the social bridge for me. He makes me more well-rounded. He helps me to avoid things such as depression.”

Unlike a lot of service dogs, that was not Sage’s initial purpose. When Sage was 9 weeks old, Bradley got him as a hunting dog. Bradley was still able to walk then but his unidentified illness (“similar to Parkinson’s without the shaking,” he said) continued to get worse. “They offered me a chair five months after getting Sage,” Bradley said. “So we decided to make Sage into a service dog. When he was about 14 or 15 months old, he had to go away for training for five months.”

Since then, Sage is always at Bradley’s side—unless he’s retrieving something. “He really helps me in softball,” Bradley said. The dog also helps with many of the usual tasks required of service dogs, such as opening

doors and turning lights on and off.

Bentley serves a similar purpose for William Hendrickson, a.k.a. “Wheelchair Willie.” In addition to lights and doors, Hendrickson said that Bentley helps him with tasks such as removing socks and jackets, too. “And he does open doors, but often different kinds of doors, if you know what I mean,” Hendrickson said. Like Sage, Bentley helps his human companion interact in the able-bodied world.



Holly Koester and Glory at the 32nd NVWG. [More photos from the Games.](#)

Holly Koester utilizes her dog, Glory, in her job as a substitute school teacher. “Glory helps kids learn about service dogs and also about people in chairs,” Koester said. “She’s an ice breaker. People are often nervous to talk to people in chairs but they’re not afraid to talk to a dog.”

Glory is the second service dog for Koester, who was in the Army 1981–91, separating from the Army after a 1990 auto accident. Her first service dog, Spokes, was nearing retirement when Koester got Glory as a puppy to eventually take over Spokes’ duties. Glory is now 4 years old.

Dave Cutsinger’s dog, Jack, serves a bit of a different purpose than Sage, Bentley and Glory. Jack is a therapy dog who can almost always be found in the lap of Cutsinger, who served in the Navy 1977–81. The duo also volunteer at their local VA hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Cutsinger’s wife, Frankie, said Jack has been a fantastic addition to the family. “He’s great for Dave’s anxiety,” she said. “Jack keeps him relaxed and prevents him from getting stressed. They are together all the time.”

[More about the 32nd National Veterans Wheelchair Games](#)

Tim W. Jackson is a freelance writer and editor in Asheville, N.C.