



GRADUATION AND RETIREMENT CEREMONY



photos & story by Zhalman Harris

Healing Paws for Warriors, Inc. held their graduation and service dog retirement program at the Northwest Florida State College on November 6, with fourteen graduates and one retiree. The graduation event takes place twice a year in May and November where new service K9s are commissioned to serve. The star of the show was Orion, a service K9 who served as a companion and a friend to Mike Arena. As the first retiree after years of service, Orion retired with a huge celebration and honorarium event. He will continue as HP4W's Community Ambassador.

HP4W's is a local nonprofit organization that provides post-9/11 combat veterans dealing with post-traumatic stress (PTS), traumatic brain injury (TBI), military sexual trauma (MST), other issues with Americans With Disabilities Act-certified service dogs, and also bringing awareness to veteran suicide; reducing the numbers one service dog at a time.

"The retirement / graduation was a huge success thanks to all the love, support and commitment," said Sheila Hale, operations manager of Healing Paws for Warriors.



James Baggins, Don Folley, Valerie Knight, Juan Hernandez, Jennifer Johnson with Chopper, Brock Merriman & Nick Boyle



Sheila Hale & Mike Arena with Ava



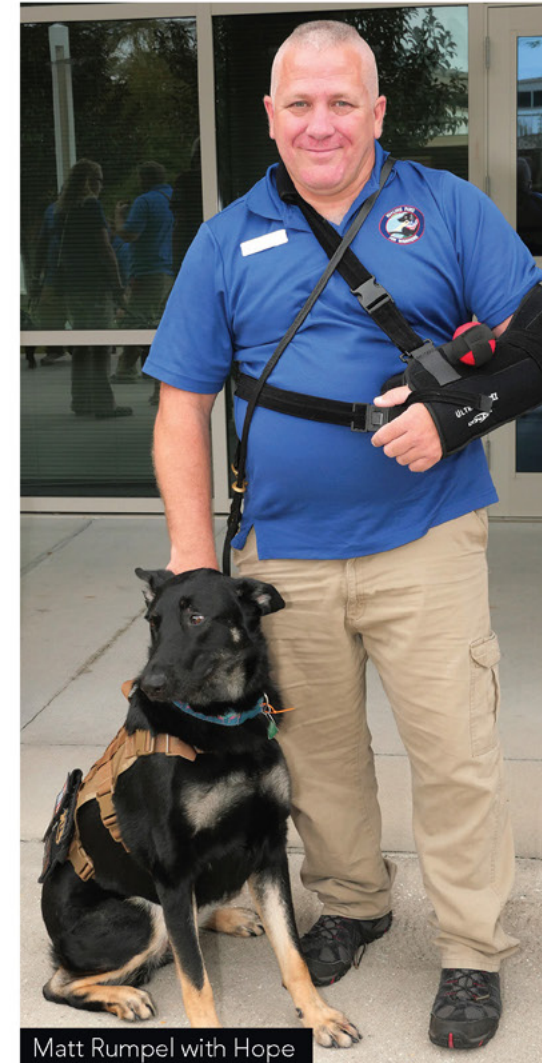
Caleb Bailey with Bell



Ashlyn Lewis-Hope with Sammy



Don Asher with Jax



Matt Rumpel with Hope



Frank Daley with Maggie Mae



Heidi Luke with Hero