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MEDIA



Tour of support

Glenview resident spreads comfort, joy to
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Kare 9 Military Ministry comfort dog Brandy stands at attention with his veteran handler Marvin Hanks and Hank's Ministry Partner and wife, Yoshiko. **INSET:** Members of the Kare 9 Squad attend the 2017 memorial service for war hero and Glenview resident Jarvis Richards, pictured here with members of his family. Hanks is fifth from left, with Brandy in front of him. PHOTOS SUBMITTED

COVER STORY

Glenview resident, pet help veterans find comfort

ALAN P. HENRY
Freelance Reporter

Several times a week, 82-year-old U.S. Navy veteran Marvin Hanks and his military ministry companion Brandy, a four-year-old comfort dog, set off to bring a smile and a little bit of joy to military veterans in need of both.

They are a part of Lutheran Church Charities' Kare 9 Military Ministry, a ministry comprised of veterans who serve veterans and their families.

Kare 9 Military Ministry dogs and their trained veteran handlers make visits upon request to VFWs, American Legion posts, veterans' hospitals, traumatic brain injury care centers, homes of veterans who are homebound, expos, vet clinics, Yellow Ribbon returning and sendoff ceremonies, and various other activities.

"We go anywhere there's a veteran or active military personnel," said Hanks, a longtime Glenview resident. "It's a real honor to visit these people and see a smile on their faces and see how relaxed they are when they pet Brandy. So many times they will say, 'You made my day by bringing her.'"

Hanks served in the Navy from 1954 to 1974, working as a machinist's mate aboard destroyers and aircraft carriers. His service included five years stationed off the coast of Vietnam aboard a destroyer that provided gunfire support for Marines and Army troops on land. He then worked as a building engineer at Allstate and retired in 1995.

In 2014, he heard LCC

was looking for veterans to help them start up a special Kare 9 ministry specifically for veterans.

In short order, 8-week-old Brandy was living with Hanks and Yoshiko, his wife of 58 years, who is also Hanks' ministry partner. Over the next 14 months, they trained two to three hours each week at LCC in Northbrook and for a total of roughly 2,000 hours at home, in class, or in the field before going on scheduled visits as requested.

Hanks and Brandy are one of nine veteran teams on the LCC squad, which is spread throughout northern Illinois. Like all LCC Kare 9 Squad dogs, Brandy was named for a military dog killed in action. Her namesake was killed in Vietnam in 1970.

All squad dogs are trained in military commands, like "attention," "march," "about face," "dress right" and "prone." All the squad dogs are golden retrievers because of the loving, easy going temperament of the breed.

And like Hanks, all squad handlers are veterans, and all are in their 70s or early 80s.

"If you are a veteran, and you meet another veteran, they can relate to you," Hanks said.

Sometimes, three or four squad members and their comfort dogs will visit a group location, such as a hospital or clinic. The veterans there can be all ages and have experience from conflicts dating back to World War II.

A good number, Hanks said, are Vietnam veterans who have lost limbs or partial eyesight due to expo-



Apprentice trainers and comfort dogs from the Northbrook-based Lutheran Church Charities attend weekly training classes held in Northbrook. PHOTO SUBMITTED

sure from Agent Orange, a jungle defoliant widely used during the war. Many of the younger veterans he sees suffer from PTSD.

"They all love to pet Brandy, and they know you understand what they've been through and they will start talking about the military with you," Hanks said.

He recalled one conversation in particular.

"I will see a veteran about my age and say, 'Were you a Vietnam veteran?' A lot of times they will say yes. One time, I asked a guy if he was a Vietnam vet and he said yes, so I asked, 'Where were you?'"

"He said, 'I am not going to tell you. I am not going to talk about the war. I never told my wife. I never told my son. I haven't talked to anybody about it since I have been to Vietnam.' I said, 'That's fine.' But as we are talking, and he is petting Brandy, he

starts talking about this time in Vietnam."

The veteran proceeded to open up about a gruesome incident he was involved in.

"That had been on his mind for 40-some years, but he finally was ready to talk about it, and he thanked me for talking to him," Hanks said. "By petting Brandy, many veterans feel comfortable enough to share things they never shared before."

Once a month, Hanks and Brandy visited with longtime Glenview resident and World War II veteran Jarvis Richards at The Grove of Northbrook Living and Rehab Center.

Richards, a member of the U.S. Army 1st Ranger Battalion, fought in the Battle of the Bulge, was taken prisoner by the Germans and escaped, and was the recipient of the Distinguished Service Cross, Silver and Bronze Star,

Purple Heart, and many other commendations for his heroism and bravery.

Jarvis told Hanks the story about how, after the war, he received a letter from the German commander who had saved his life in a prison camp, and how that commander was now destitute and asking for any help Richards could give. Richards and his church group put together a collection and sent it to him.

Hanks and Brandy, along with other Kare 9 Squad teams, continued to visit Richards on a regular basis. When Richards died in 2017, his family asked that donations be sent to the LCC Kare 9 Military Ministry.

Another emotional moment for Hanks comes when he and other squad members attend Camp Hometown Heroes in Wisconsin, a national free weeklong overnight summer camp for children

between the ages of 7 to 17 of fallen U.S. servicemen and women.

"It is very, very sad, but the Kare 9 dogs bring a comforting moment to camp attendees and staff," he said. "The Kare 9 Squad is honored to serve these brave families."

For Hanks, being a member of the Kare 9 Military Ministry is not just about doing good, but also being active.

"If I didn't do this, I would probably be sitting home watching TV and eating. But Brandy keeps me busy. She keeps me active."

LCC's Kare 9 ministries never charge those they serve and are donor-funded. To learn more about the Kare 9 Military Ministry, if you are a veteran who might benefit from a Kare 9 team visit, or to donate, contact them at 866-455-6466 or visit www.Kare9.org.