



Contact: Katie Malatino, Public Relations
Canine Companions for Independence
Phone: (760) 901-4307
E-mail: kmalatino@cci.org
February 1, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CANINE COMPANIONS SALUTES INDEPENDENCE on March 19

Service Dog Organization to Honor Disabled Veterans with Free Community Event

OCEANSIDE, CA Canine Companions for Independence will hold a free community event at the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center's Recreational Rehab Gym at 921 NE 13th Street on Saturday, March 19, 2011 from 9AM until 5PM. *Canine Companions for Independence is a non-profit organization that enhances the lives of people with disabilities by providing highly trained assistance dogs and ongoing support to ensure quality partnerships.* The event, CANINE COMPANIONS SALUTES INDEPENDENCE, will feature resources for disabled veterans and family-friendly activities. It will highlight Canine Companions' Wounded Veterans Initiative, which was established to increase placements of assistance dogs with disabled veterans who have served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan. Military veterans, active-duty service members, their families and friends are encouraged to attend CANINE COMPANIONS SALUTES INDEPENDENCE.

Canine Companions has partnered with the Folds of Honor Foundation and the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center on this special event to ensure a broad spectrum of resources for disabled veterans are represented. The Folds of Honor Foundation provides post-secondary educational scholarships for children and spouses of service members killed or disabled while serving our great nation. The Oklahoma City VA Medical Center honors America's veterans by providing exceptional healthcare that improves their quality of life. Currently, there are two Canine Companions facility dogs working with disabled veterans at the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center alongside professionals in occupational and recreational therapy.

CANINE COMPANIONS SALUTES INDEPENDENCE will also include games and prizes, face painting, live music by Bad Influence, all-American refreshments and gift bags for children of service members. Of course, there will be many opportunities to meet Canine Companions assistance dogs and puppies-in-program and to learn about the journey from puppyhood to working dog. Guests will see live assistance dog demonstrations, as well as a video tour of Canine Companions' Oceanside, California training center. Veterans will explain how their assistance dogs help with everyday practical tasks. Canine Companions staff and volunteers will answer questions. Other resources for veterans with disabilities that will be featured at the event include the Tinker Air Force Base Airman & Family Readiness Center, Newby-Vance Mobility and Hanger Prosthetics & Orthotics.

"We are excited for this unique opportunity to honor those who have sacrificed for our country," explains Linda Valliant, Canine Companions Southwest Region Executive Director. "We also look forward to serving more Oklahomans with disabilities – both military and civilian." Canine Companions placed 27 assistance dogs in roles that serve injured veterans in 2010. Veterans with spinal cord injuries, brain trauma, hearing impairment or limb amputations may benefit from a Canine Companions assistance dog.

Currently, there are eight Canine Companions graduate teams (human-canine partners) living in Oklahoma. Dawn Ramsey, who is partnered with Service Doganela, lives in Shawnee. In addition to being a Canine Companions graduate, Dawn is an active volunteer and the chairperson of the CANINE COMPANIONS SALUTES INDEPENDENCE event.

“Canine Companions assistance dogs can help injured service members – not only with physical tasks, but also with the difficult adjustment to living with a disability and transitioning to civilian life,” Valliant explains. Service dogs are trained in approximately 50 commands including opening doors, activating light switches and retrieving dropped items. Hearing dogs alert people to important sounds like knocks on the door and smoke alarms. Facility dogs work alongside professionals in therapeutic and rehabilitative settings. There is no charge for a Canine Companions assistance dog, its training or ongoing follow-up services.

About CANINE COMPANIONS SALUTES INDEPENDENCE:

For more information, visit www.cci.org/salutes or call (760) 901-4300.

About Canine Companions for Independence:

Canine Companions for Independence provides highly-trained assistance dogs to children and adults with disabilities. Established in 1975, Canine Companions has five regional training centers across the country. Canine Companions is recognized worldwide for the excellence of its dogs, and the quality and longevity of the matches it makes between dogs and people. For more information, visit www.cci.org or call 1-800-572-BARK.

###