

The Bandera PROPHEET

November 10, 2019

Local business partners with Bandera ISD in pilot program for service animals

Owner also recognized for commitment to helping others

By Chris Darus

The Bandera Prophet

Operation Overwatch and the Bandera High School Ag Dept. have joined forces to benefit each other.

A donated 7-month-old Australian shepherd will be trained as a service animal by students in two classes at BHS over the next six months. The dog is the second donated by Roxyann Baldwin from B-Wins Aussies in Kerrville.

Each student who participates will be responsible for a week of training and caring for the dog while advancing their animal husbandry, behavioral and veterinary skills along with being held responsible and accountable while helping to socialize the dog.

Weekly meetings with Brice Cavanaugh, president of Operation Overwatch, overseeing the process as it moves along, will help track the dog's progression and development of the skills to become an ADA certified Service Animal.

Operation Overwatch benefits by getting an animal ready to hand over to a First Responder or military veteran in need of a Service Animal, not having to kennel the animal which opens up a space for another

trainable dog.

It also helps to bring the community together by having local vet Dr. Conrad Nightingale come into the classroom and talk about inoculations, grooming and all of the husbandry skills needed to keep the animal on the straight and narrow.

All of the training and data the students do will be passed along to the recipient of the animal.

While there are some schools that are helping train guide dogs for the blind, this is one of the first programs with service dogs in the state.

After this trial run, there is a possibility for the number of dogs to increase and allowing the program to grow at the high school.

Operation Overwatch is a Bandera based, non-profit organization that focuses on rescuing canines and trains them to be service dogs for military vets and first responders in need as a result of PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury or those needing mobility assistance.

There is no cost to the recipient for the service animal except for food and vet care after they take ownership.

The organization runs 100 percent off of donations and grants and was recently recognized and presented a \$25,000 grant by the Petco Foundation.

The grant was part of Petco's "Helping Heroes" in store fund-raising campaign that happens every October and celebrates the life changing results that therapy, working and service animals have on the lives of people.

Cavanaugh's other business, Cavanaugh Coffee Co., is also a contributor to the non-profit.