

# Dog helps battle veteran's echoes of war

■ Organization matches pair, covers costs

By Robyn Flans  
Special to The Star

Vietnam veteran Allen Ghimenti knows that dog truly is man's best friend.

The 69-year-old Thousand Oaks resident recently procured Jetstar, a Labrador retriever and German shepherd mix, through the Ventura chapter of Pets for Vets after the death of Calie, his dog of 15 years.

"When I go for a walk with her, she pulls me through the hills in the area, which allows me to walk easier," Ghimenti said. "I'm getting tugged by a tugboat."



ANTHONY PLASCENCIA/THE STAR

Allen Ghimenti, of Thousand Oaks, takes his service dog, Jetstar, on one of their several daily walks Monday. **See a video at VCStar.com.**

At night, Ghimenti, who has post-traumatic stress disorder, has flashbacks of battles.

"She has woken me up three times since I've gotten her," Ghimenti said. "I don't know if I was

whimpering or what I was doing, but she knew something was wrong and she nudged me in the head

**VCStar.com**

For a list of Veterans Day events, visit [VCStar.com](http://VCStar.com).

with her snout."

It took three months for the Ventura chapter, which was formed in May 2014, to match Ghimenti and Jetstar. It was the chapter's first match.

Mardu and Ron Lydick said they formed the chapter because of their appreciation of both veterans and animal rescues. They said it took time to get the volunteers and trainers on board, as well as the funding: It costs about \$1,500 to \$2,000 to provide a dog for a veteran.

"That is for adoption fees, shots, veterinary care,

**See PETS, 3B**

---

## **PETS** from **1B**

---

microchipping, neutering, as well as a welcome package,” Mardu Lydick said.

The welcome package includes all the basics a dog needs — crate, treats, bed, collar, leash and toys — so there are no out-of-pocket expenses for the veteran.

“My goal is to have a team of qualified trainers so I can have a couple of matches going at the same time so we can respond to the applications in a timely manner,” Lydick said.

Trainer Bob Horrell, also a Vietnam veteran, spent a month searching shelters and rescues to meet the criteria Ghimenti put forth in their initial interview. Their meeting clarified how the PTSD manifests itself, the veteran’s lifestyle and the

personality and kind of dog the veteran wanted.

Ghimenti requested a medium-energy, medium-size female dog and, if possible, a brown one.

“He lives in an apartment, so it had to be one that would be happy living in that setting,” Horrell said.

Pets for Vets looks for dogs that are 2 to 5 years old, past puppy behavior, who are social and will form a bond.

Horrell began his search online, screening close to 400 dogs, then looked at an additional 40 dogs at several Los Angeles County shelters as close as possible to his home in Acton. He found 4-year-old Jetstar in Lancaster.

The indicator for Horrell was in the meet-and-greet area, when Jetstar sniffed the other dogs but remained attentive to Horrell. She seemed

well-adjusted, he said.

Horrell and Lydick spent five weeks on Horrell’s 10-acre ranch, training the dog in basic commands and socializing. They presented Jetstar to Ghimenti in August. Everyone agrees it was an emotional moment.

“It was so nice to see the smile on Allen’s face and the excitement when he first set eyes on Jetstar,” Lydick said.

Horrell said, “To be able to help a veteran and an animal at the same time with the same effort, I can’t tell you the feeling.”

Jetstar provides Ghimenti with purpose.

“She’s another living creature that gives me love, and I give her love,” Ghimenti said.

“She relies on me to exist in this world. The companionship is getting stronger as the bond grows day by day.”