

The Arlington Connection

Bonds of Service, an event in support of the National Service Animals Monument, took place at Arlington National Cemetery, Military Women's Memorial, home to The Pledge, a life-sized bronze statue of a female servicemember and her dog, by sculptor Susan Bahary.



"LET THE GENERATIONS KNOW THAT WOMEN IN UNIFORM ALSO GUARANTEED THEIR FREEDOM. THAT OUR RESOLVE WAS JUST AS GREAT AS THE BRAVE MEN WHO STAND AMONG US. AND WITH VICTORY, OUR HEARTS WERE JUST AS FULL AND BEAT JUST AS FAST - THAT THE TEARS FELL JUST AS HARD FOR THOSE WE LEFT BEHIND."

ANNE SOSH BREHM, 1LT, U.S. ARMY NURSE CORPS, WWII

Getting Ready
For 250th

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Honoring Service
Animals of Many Types

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PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Planning for National Service Animals Monument

Approved by
Congress in
2022.

BY ASHLEY SIMPSON
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

There is something uncontroversially unifying in the works, a national monument coming to the D.C. area that will honor all types of service animals of the past, present, and future.

World-renowned sculptor Susan Bahary and the rest of the National Service Animals Monument (NSAM) team, a non-profit organization, have been working for years to bring this powerful tribute to Washington D.C. Groups are still finalizing the monument's precise location and the artistic design and concept. But one thing is for sure: the monument will represent the unbreakable bond between humans and all the animals that have served as part of the U.S. armed services.

"I realized several years ago that we really needed to have national recognition for these service animals and our handlers because they represent our greatest American values," Bahary said. "Those of service, sacrifice, courage, and duty, that's the overarching theme of our monument. It will honor the human-animal bond and what they have been able to do to shape our nation's history, from all the deeds and services and sacrifices since George Washington's horses all the way through the dolphins that help patrol our borders today."

The National Service Animals Monument will also honor the service animals who work stateside to support veterans with PTSD and other challenges.

This week, the NSAM officially invited the public to be part of bringing this monument to life. Along with title sponsor U.S. War Dogs Association, a non-profit organization that supports military dogs (and their handlers) from active duty through retirement, the NSAM hosted the inaugural Bonds of Service event in Arlington, Virginia.

The Bonds of Service event kicked off fundraising and bringing awareness to the coming National Service Animals Monument.



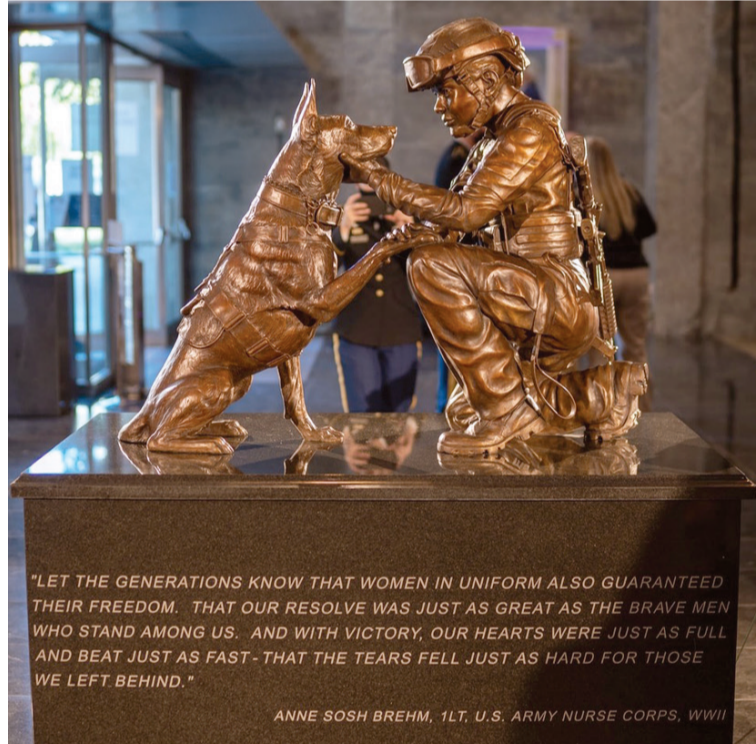
Rendering of National Service Animals Monument.

"This is the first event that NSAM has done in the D.C. area, and I am so excited about it because it will be a microcosm of what our monument represents, bringing people together in the way that the monument will," Bahary said. "It's a labor of love for everyone involved."

Bonds of Service took place at the Military Women's Memorial, home to The Pledge, a life-sized bronze statue of a female servicemember and her dog, which Bahary was commissioned to sculpt in 2020.

The event coincides with National K9 Veterans Day on March 13, so it focused on service dogs. It brought together more than 30 K9 teams, dedicated pairs of dogs and human handlers who have served the U.S. military.

"The goal is to get our key supporters and service animal networks together in one room so everyone can truly hear the vision of what's to come," Chris Willingham, 20-year U.S. Marine Corps veteran and President of U.S. War Dogs, said. Willingham remembers his own late service dog, Lucca, who risked her life to detect explosives and serve hundreds of Marine



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people who appreciate the value of what these military animals do for us both overseas and at home.

K9s; it'll be great to get everyone on the same page."

The event opened with a wreath-laying ceremony at The Pledge statue, where 19 participants paid heartfelt tribute to the K9s they served alongside. Following a series of speakers, the reception featured a performance by the Quantico Marine Quintet.

All ticket sales proceeds are going toward the building of the national monument, which Bahary expects to be completed, dedicated, and ready for the public to enjoy within the next five years.

"We are really launching our capital campaign now, so we invite the entire country to join us in any way they can, whether through their time, treasure, talents, or

simply by spreading the word," she said. "We want as many people involved, across the whole country, as possible."

This monument was approved by Congress in 2022 with bipartisan support. Veterans who have had the honor of serving alongside animals see it as long overdue homage.

"When you have the chance to build a monument in our nation's capital to honor these working dogs, you take it," Willingham said. "This aligns perfectly with our mission. These animals do so much for so many, speaking as someone who has served overseas. They are truly special, and seeing them finally get the national recognition and awareness they deserve is something we are incredibly proud to be part of."

Bahary knows just how rewarding this work is, having created not only The Pledge, but also the country's first ever war dog monument, Always Faithful, whose home is at the National War Dog Cemetery at the U.S. Naval Base Guam.

A lifelong animal lover whose dogs were some of her earliest muses, Bahary said Always Faithful was the project that opened her eyes to the untold story of service animals, who don't get pensions, promotions or Purple Hearts.

"With that statue in 1994, I realized the profound bond and bravery of our war dog teams," Bahary said. "They are critical to our nation's history. Honoring them became a calling for me — it is an incredibly worthy cause to raise awareness for the incredible work and sacrifice of all who serve."

This will be a fantastic monument for anyone to visit, for people to learn about the sacrifices that they likely never read about in textbooks. It will also be a powerful reminder of the impenetrable bond between all humans and their animals.

"This monument will be about two things, honor and education," Willingham said. "I'm excited to have D.C. have a place that represents all the thousands of animals who have provided some type of service to this country. I envision somewhere people can walk through and spend time with their loved ones, including their animals, and grow in appreciation for those who have served our nation. A spot that will make you want to go home and hug your dog a little tighter. It'll be a wonderful addition."

To learn more on how to support the monument, visit: <https://nationalserviceanimalsmonument.org/bonds-of-service-national-tribute/>.

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— Sculptor Susan Bahary

Corps missions in the Middle East.

Willingham added, "This event is going to be special because you're bringing in like-minded

I think it's going to be a great launching point to garner support and elevate awareness. We'll be there with several multipurpose