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****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

PAWS/LA TO LAUNCH **PROJECT PETSTRONG** FOR VETS AND PETS

Los Angeles, CA – **PAWS/LA (Pets Are Wonderful Support Los Angeles)**, the nonprofit that has been assisting low-income pet guardians in Los Angeles since 1989, will launch a new program for veterans with PTSD called **PROJECT PETSTRONG** on, November 11, 2016, Veterans Day. **PROJECT PETSTRONG is the first program in Los Angeles County dedicated to assisting low-income veterans with PTSD care for their companion pets by providing free services that ease the financial, physical and emotional challenges of providing for a companion animal. Enrollment for services is now open.**

Studies conducted around the country indicate that veterans thrive with animals by their side. A recent University of Texas study **reported that veterans with pets see improvements in their overall happiness, ability to cope with stress and relationships with others.** Animals can draw out even the most isolated personality, even helping traumatized veterans overcome emotional numbness. **Participants in the study reported that the close bonds they formed with their pets enabled them to be more physically and socially active — key factors for preventing veteran suicide.**

According to research conducted by PAWS/LA, **there are as many as 6,000 low-income veterans with PTSD in Los Angeles County** who rely on a service, emotional support or therapy animal to cope with the devastating effects of PTSD. More than 70% of these veterans expressed a significant need for assistance with the care of their companion pet. As a result of these findings, PAWS/LA is launching **PROJECT PETSTRONG** to serve this community in need. Veterans with PTSD and their pets can begin enrolling immediately by **visiting www.pawsla.org/veterans.**

“Loneliness is crippling and our companion animals help fight that loneliness,” says Kevin L., 55, Air Force veteran, and his dog Bella. “I first met Bella at one of the loneliest and darkest times in my life. I was a homeless US veteran for 28 years, I had been living with HIV for close to three decades, I had recently been incarcerated because of my dependence on drugs and alcohol, and I was close to the edge. To make a long story short, years of living on the street left me with a hardened heart – but Bella melted my heart. She broke me down... in a good way. **PAWS/LA was there when we needed help** and I will always be grateful for the free pet food, supplies, toys, housing support and veterinary care they provided to make Bella better. If it wasn’t for PAWS/LA, I might have been forced to give her up or lost her to malnutrition. But, like I said, she’s right here by my side.”

About PAWS/LA: Founded in 1989, PAWS/LA is a Los Angeles-based non-profit agency dedicated to preserving the healing benefits of animal companionship for low-income elderly and those debilitated by life-threatening illness. To that end, the agency provides a comprehensive range of services, including veterinary care, pet food & supplies, and assistance for homebound clients, such as dog walking, pet food delivery and pet transport. PAWS/LA protects the human-animal bond.



PAWS/LA presents **PROJECT PETSTRONG**

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT DOG HELPS VETERAN FIGHT DEPRESSION AND LONELINESS

Kevin L., 55, is a Veteran of the United States Air Force. His best friend and constant companion is a little black Chihuahua named Miss Bella. Kevin depends on her for companionship and the unconditional love that only a beloved emotional support animal can provide. She looks to him for shelter, food and affection.



When Kevin fell on hard times and could no longer take care of Bella on his own, he turned to PAWS/LA for help. The nonprofit, which has been assisting low-income pet guardians in Los Angeles since 1989, provided them with free pet food, supplies and veterinary care when they needed it most.

“Loneliness is crippling,” Kevin says. “I first met Bella at one of the loneliest and darkest times in my life. I had been living with HIV for close to three decades, I was a homeless US veteran for 28 years, I had recently been incarcerated because of my dependence on drugs and alcohol, and I was close to the edge. To make a long story short, years of living on the street left me with a hardened heart – but Bella melted my heart. She broke me down... in a good way.”

Bella transformed Kevin’s life. Thanks to her, Kevin has managed to stay sober. Her love has allowed him to put his life back on track. He now has a job, which he enjoys and is good at, and he even has a place to live. Kevin says that Bella gives him a reason to wake up in the morning and to come home at night.

“I will always be grateful for the help that PAWS/LA provided us,” Kevin says. “If it wasn’t for PAWS/LA, I might have been forced to give her up or lost her to malnutrition. But, like I said, she’s still right here by my side.”

On Veterans Day 2016, PAWS/LA will launch a new program called **PROJECT PETSTRONG** to help veterans like Kevin benefit from the healing bond between humans and their companion animals.

“I see a lot of veterans with pets living on Skid Row,” Kevin says. “Even though much progress has been made in getting veterans housed, I see these men and women of all ages and backgrounds on the street. As a veteran, I know that living by yourself can be hard and lonely. Our companion animals help us fight that depression and loneliness.”

For more information about PAWS/LA and PROJECT PETSTRONG, please visit
www.pawsla.org/veterans or www.petstrong.org