

It's a dog's life at Journey of Misfits

By: [Elizabeth Jaeger](#)

New business fetches the hearts of many through obedience classes, therapy visits

It is clear from the moment you step into the training room at Journey of Misfits exactly what are the priorities of owner Angela Strong.

Frames fill the wall behind the welcome desk featuring pictures of dogs she has owned and those she has worked with.

Flags and pictures of war memorials also decorate the space. Strong has melded her fondness for the way that dogs bring people together with her respect for military veterans to build her new business, located in North St. Paul.

Strong has been training dogs for 18 years and said she had been searching for a job that combined her interests. Friends and family frequently suggested she start her own dog training business, but she said that the timing never seemed quite right.

As support increased from those around her, she finally felt as if the hurdle of starting a business was one she could jump over. In November 2015, the journey began as Strong opened the doors of her new company.

At Journey of Misfits, Strong works to evaluate therapy dogs as well as offering obedience classes.

The community had already felt the presence of Strong's passions before she even opened her doors. At the 2015 event recognizing Veteran's Day as well as the completion of the new North St. Paul Veterans Park, Strong was an integral part of organizing the synchronized parachute jump. The event was so popular, it will likely be staged again in 2016.

She explained that she has many family members who are veterans, which has led to interest in helping current and former service members. Recognition at Veterans Day ceremonies help, as well finding ways to assist service members with her dogs, which are trained therapy animals.

Strong is a big advocate for therapy dog programs and knows just how big an impact these animals can have on people who are hurting, either physically or mentally.

Having had an illness that required hospitalization, she said she recognizes that being able to spend time with her dog Buzz during her hospital stay was a large part of her healing process. As a result of that experience, Strong does a lot of work with therapy dogs, bringing them on visits with hospice patients, veterans and others that she feels can benefit from interacting with them.

"Watching the dogs work with people is unbelievable," Strong said, adding that she has "seen miracles happen because of them." Dogs allow for an easy way to break down barriers between people and bring them together. A big part of their effectiveness as a therapy method is that they make people — especially war veterans — feel comfortable and more willing to open up and tell stories, Strong explained.

She has also had an impact on everyday attendees of her dog obedience classes. Susie Danielson and Barb Kruise have been bringing their canines to her classes for three years. Kruise said that within five minutes of their first session with Strong, they could tell it was the right fit "and have never looked back since."

Danielson remarked that when she found out her dog, Riley, had cancer, Strong adapted the training classes to fit their new needs, and that it made all the difference for them.

Kruise added that Strong was an integral part of her switch from owning small dogs to larger ones, and helped her make adjustments during the transition.

Strong said she does not believe in cookie-cutter methods of dog training and is continually adapting her way of teaching to fit the needs of the owners and their canine companions. Sometimes she even does one-on-one classes.

For Strong, dogs are more than just pets; they are family, and the people that she works with become family, too. Her training room is filled with gifts given to her by clients. The owners often stay in close contact long after their dogs have graduated from training classes.

"We're a bunch of misfits, from all walks of life, and we normally would not have met if it hadn't been for our dogs," Strong explained, adding that she is grateful for the many friendships she has gained through these animals and the opportunities they have opened for her.

Her clients appear to be just as grateful to her for all that she has taught them, as are all those who have benefited from visits with her gentle therapy dogs.

