

# Canine companion would fill need for Beck PRIDE vets

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**JONESBORO** — A new veterans program is getting started to help connect individuals with a furry friend.

The Battle Buddies: Paws for Vets program will address the need and interest of Northeast Arkansas veterans to improve their daily living activities through an emotional support dog, said Lynda Nash, director of the Beck PRIDE Center.

"I've had a lot of veterans who have expressed interest about getting a dog," Nash added. "Some have tried to get a service dog, but the wait list is so long or they would

have to drive so far." Others are also unable to do it out-of-pocket and/or need more training.

Emotional support dogs provide comfort and support through companionship and help with depression, anxiety, fear/phobias and other psychological and emotional conditions, according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) National Network.

The ADA typically does not consider emotional support dogs as service animals because they often do not perform tasks to assist people with disabilities. But, the exception includes those trained

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to detect the onset of psychiatric episodes and lessen the effects.

An example is providing safety checks or room searches, or turning on lights for people with post-traumatic stress disorder, according to the network.

"If someone truly needs a true service dogs, we can see how we can help them," Nash said, adding there is a wide range of specific tasks that service dogs can be trained to provide.

The Beck PRIDE Center, housed on the Arkansas State University campus, provides combat-wounded veterans with educational programs and services.

Veterans, who do not

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**Lynda Nash**

Director of the Beck PRIDE Center

have to attend ASU to receive help, are provided resources to access higher education, counseling, personal rehabilitation, advocacy and financial assistance.

While Nash is still finalizing details, she said they established the program

because it could benefit many veterans, including especially those suffering from PTSD. These dogs do not require as much training as a service dog, but can still provide the emotional support the veteran needs.

"These dogs can help if the veterans struggle in crowds to help calm them down enough to be out in society," she said.

Any dog selected to be an emotional support dog must demonstrate the appropriate personality to be out in the public and receive basic obedience training.

"Veterans must show they can afford the upkeep of the dog," Nash said. "It's a responsibility, not just a fun thing."

Nash hopes to be able to match veterans with

dogs from local animal shelters. She said the program will help cover the adoption fee, dog training and ongoing classes for veterans on the use of an emotional support dog.

The dogs' collars will identify the dogs as emotional support dogs.

Nash and colleagues have wanted to start the program for a while, but she said they had to wait for funding. They just received a grant to help kick it off and will soon begin additional fundraising campaigns.

The rough estimate to provide an emotional support dog is \$500, she said.

For more information, contact the Beck PRIDE Center office at 972-2624.