

# PAWS FOR A GOOD CAUSE

Vets Helping Heroes Provides Service Dogs To Injured Soldiers  
By Emily J. Minor

The average guy doesn't start off a new career when he's in his mid-80s, but then Irwin Stovroff isn't your average guy.

Boca Raton resident Stovroff, 88, is a retired Air Force lieutenant who served in World War II as a B24 bombardier with the U.S. Army Air Corps. He's also a former prisoner of war, taken and held after being shot down over Germany.

He's a man who knows that war is not easily forgotten.

After a long career in the furniture business, Stovroff eventually moved to Boca Raton from Greensboro, N.C., in 1985. And it was in South Florida, during his 12 years of volunteer work at the VA Medical Center in Riviera Beach, that Stovroff knew he must do something more to help the struggle of soldiers returning from the Iraq conflict.

"This is a horrible, horrible situation for these guys coming back," he says.

In 2006, Stovroff started a nonprofit organization that today is named Vets Helping Heroes. To date, he's helped raise more than \$2 million

to provide service dogs for returning veterans, men and women alike, who suffer with everything from post-traumatic stress disorder and amputation to blindness, seizures and brain injuries.

"Let's put it this way," he says. "The dog can take them away from a suicidal mood, because they are committing suicide at a higher rate than any other war we've had."

The charity got off to a rather slow start, as new charities tend to do. But an appearance on Fox News last July helped him turn a corner.

"They put me on four or five times one day and the next thing you know, I did another show, and another," he says. "I ended up raising about \$250,000." From there, he appeared on "The Bonnie Hunt Show" ("She likes animals," he says) "Inside Edition" and lots of local affiliates.

To date, the organization has placed about 35 service dogs with veterans all across America.

To be perfectly blunt, Stovroff doesn't need your time or your old clothing. He needs your money. Vets Helping Heroes buys the dogs from a veteran

dog-training operation and each one costs roughly \$50,000. That first purchase pays for a soldier's lifetime of replacement dogs.

"There aren't too many 88-year-old guys out there pounding the pavement like this," Stovroff says.

But, like we mentioned, Irwin Stovroff is a pretty unusual fellow.

*Want to help? For more information about Vets Helping Heroes, call 561-251-9296. You can also make a donation online at [vetshelpingheroes.org](http://vetshelpingheroes.org), or simply read more about Stovroff's charity. ○*



**SOLDIERS' BEST FRIEND:** Irwin Stovroff with one of his service dogs.