

Every year, the Collie Club of America selects the Shining Star Ambassador from entries submitted by Collie owners throughout the world. The awards program is open to any Collie that works as a service dog, therapy dog, library assistance dog, search and rescue dog, or trauma response dog, or has done any exceptionally good deed for his family or the community. All applicants meeting the Shining Star criteria receive a frame-worthy certificate. The Collie/human team that is selected as the Shining Star Ambassador team is the representative of all the Shining Star nominees.

The Collie Club of America Shining Star Committee takes great pleasure in introducing the Shining Star Ambassador for 2022: Rita Doyle and Maverick. Rita is an Army nurse who served our nation during the first Gulf War. At Rita's side is Maverick, a five-year-old male sable Rough Collie. Maverick's breeder is Melanie Adkins whose kennel is Adair Springs Collies of Kentucky. As a Hope Animal Assisted Crisis Response Team, Rita and Maverick were deployed to the Surfside Condo collapse in South Florida where they comforted families and first responders. The Kroger Supermarket chain paid for Rita and Maverick to comfort employees and families following the employee shootings near Memphis, Tennessee. The CFO of Kroger proclaimed that Maverick was a "Hero of Kroger" after witnessing Maverick's ability to provide comfort. Rita and Maverick were deployed to the flooding Mississippi River at Waverly, Tennessee; the first team at the scene. Maverick and Rita comforted 1500 people over three days, 500 people per day. The Red Cross formally recognized Rita and Maverick for their extraordinary work at the Waverly flooding disaster.

Rita Doyle started training Maverick when he was a puppy; she specifically trained Maverick to comfort people. As part of the training, Rita made certain that Maverick was exposed to noisy and chaotic situations. These situations included a busy firehouse with flashing lights and loud alarms. The firefighters were busy suiting up and swinging equipment onto the trucks to fight the fires. Similarly, Rita took Maverick to school playgrounds that were full of children playing, shouting, and screaming. Maverick was first certified as a therapy dog; he undertook additional training to be certified as a HOPE Animal Assisted Crisis Response dog. Rita and Maverick continue to perform both general therapy work as well as serving as a HOPE Animal Assisted Crisis Response Team.

For the past four years, Rita and Maverick have performed general therapy work in Tennessee and Florida. Maverick has won the hearts of residents of several nursing homes. Residents love therapy time with Maverick. Family members have commented to the staff how active and happy their loved ones are after his visits. The nurses jokingly call Maverick "physical therapy time with fur" as he gets everyone to stand up from their chairs in order to pet Maverick.

Maverick's calming effect and fluffy coat has offered a much-needed break for Vanderbilt University students taking exams. Suicide on college campuses has risen over the years and Maverick's campus work has likely saved lives.

On one occasion, Rita received a call from Sumner County Regional hospital to visit a patient in the ICU. The woman had shut down and would not talk to anyone. Maverick entered her room and placed his head on her bed. For the first time in months, the woman spoke; her first words were "my puppy." Maverick stayed by her bed for over an hour, which allowed the nurses to finally talk to the patient. As of today, Maverick is the only animal that has ever been allowed on the ICU floor of this hospital.

Maverick's special connection to children also led to a call from Nashville's district attorney's office. Maverick's presence gave a young girl the courage to be interviewed by the prosecutor and police. Maverick accompanied the girl to court when she took the witness stand to testify.

Here are some specific highlights from Maverick's career.

In 2021, Maverick completed his CGCU and CGCA Certification.

Maverick is a member of Music City Pet Partners (TN), HOPE Animal Assisted Crisis Response Team (National), Five Flags (FL), and Paw Patrol (FL).

Maverick deployed with HOPE to the Miami/Surfside FL condo collapse; flooding disaster in Waverly TN; and the Kroger supermarket shooting in the Memphis area.

With HOPE Crisis Response, Maverick arrived with the first group of Therapy Dogs to the Surfside Condo collapse. Maverick provided comfort to first responders at the command center and spent many hours with family members awaiting word on the fate of their loved ones.

The authorities asked Rita and Maverick to attend the daily command post briefings near the site of the Surfside condo collapse. Maverick represented the HOPE Crisis response team during news segments on television news and multiple local news articles. These briefings and TV news appearances ultimately led to a Washington Post article on the key role played by therapy dogs in mass casualty events.

Upon returning home from the Surfside condo collapse, Maverick represented the Collie breed very well during two interviews with the local TV stations. The reporters discussed Maverick's training, AKC Certifications, and the role of Collie personality and temperament to comprise the perfect therapy dog.

Maverick has provided valuable Collie breed public relations exposure via articles in the Washington Post, Miami Herald, Daily Memphorian, Pensacola News Journal, and the Northrop Grumman monthly newsletter.

With Music City Pet Partners, Rita and Maverick have made numerous regular visits to Sumner Regional Hospital in Gallatin, TN, and Belvedere Nursing Home in Fort Walton, FL.

Also with Music City Pet Partners, Rita and Maverick were deployed to the Waverly, TN, flooding disaster. As the first crisis response team on the scene, they comforted first responders and flood victims alike. Team Maverick was the only therapy team during the first three days of the flood response. Maverick visited upwards of 500 people a day for a total of 1500 visits.

Maverick was formally recognized by the Red Cross for his work at the Waverly, TN, flooding disaster.

Rita and Maverick responded to the Kroger Supermarket Shootings in Collierville, Tennessee. The CFO of Kroger proclaimed that Maverick was a "Hero of Kroger" after witnessing Maverick's ability to provide comfort. Maverick visited with every victim and every family member.