

Travelin' Jack stops by Gallup for patriotic fundraiser

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On Dec. 1, Travelin' Jack's "Howl-I-Day Give Back Tour" stopped in Gallup to support the Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura Scholarship Fund and the Toys For Tots drive for area youth.

Travelin' Jack is also known as U.S. Marine Corps Colonel Jack. He is an Old English bulldog and the official mascot for the Delta Company Marines, based in Albuquerque.

Jill Lane, self-proclaimed chauffer and handler, accompanied Jack, who donned the rank of corporal for the Gallup fundraiser.

"He [has] been the mascot of Delta Company for about five years. He [has] been in front of the camera doing a lot of modeling and TV work for about eight years," Lane said.

Jack holds more than one impressive title. The bulldog is also known as Travelin' Jack: New Mexico's Pet Travel Reporter and Adventure Dog.

"Jack's been to Gallup a number of times and he likes to promote and explore things all over New Mexico that are pet friendly for folks who are traveling with pets," Lane said.

The pup also visited Gallup in 2012 for the Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial and filmed the pet friendly segment of the television broadcast.

Jack's latest visit brought him to Comfort Suites of Gallup. Lane commended Kenneth Riege, general manager, for inviting Jack to Gallup to support the community toy drive and scholarship fundraising.

A PLACE TO HONOR VETERANS

The Comfort Suites proved a perfect location to host the patriotic bulldog. Visitors there cannot

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help but notice all of the military memorabilia featured in the lobby. Among the items on display are jungle boots spit shined to perfection, a combat rifle in a display case, American flags and information about the beloved Navajo Code Talkers of World War II.

The military and veteran heritage of Gallup is reflected throughout the Comfort Suites, Riege said, noting that patrons of Comfort Suites of Gallup donated the military memorabilia.

"We are happy that Jack supported our fundraising efforts for the Hershey Miyamura Scholarship and our local Toys For Tots drive," Riege said.

Gallup residents still have time to donate to the Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura Scholarship Fund. "Our toy drive will continue until Dec. 15, and people are welcome to drop off toys or make a monetary donation for the scholarship," Riege said.

Jack's visit coincided with Gallup's balloon rally, an event that Riege said is great for business. Hotel guests are often overwhelmed by the sight of 50-60 hot air balloons flying first thing the morning, he added.

Riege is an Air Force veteran and served eight years at air bases in Panama City, San Antonio and Korea before returning home for duty at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque.

There, he met his wife, a resident of Gallup, and made the move to the Most Patriotic Small Town in America.

"I immediately fell in love with the community and I started getting involved with community activities," he said.

A trip to the breakfast area of the hotel lobby will reveal five framed photos of Congressional Medal of Honor recipients who have stayed at the hotel.

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"This area is dedicated to the Medal of Honor recipients who have been here: Mr. Miyamura from the Korean War, three recipients from the Vietnam War and one from Afghanistan. It's here to honor our veterans," Riege said.

The Comfort Suites opened in November 2009 and is celebrating its eighth anniversary. "We've had a good run and we look forward to serving our community and increasing our veterans' memorial," Riege said.

A GOOD DOG FOR GALLUP

Travelin' Jack will return to Gallup again. Until then, he encourages people to share the greatest gift this holiday season by helping others. Gallup residents can look to the bulldog's own work for inspiration. Thanks to his dogged advocacy for animal welfare organizations across the state, Jack has raised about \$25,000 for New Mexico shelters.

"It's a good time for everybody to reach deep and ask, how can I give back to my community," Lane said.

She also encouraged adoption for anyone looking to add a pet to his or her life.

"Adopt from a shelter and save lives [of] animals that need a forever home," Lane said.

For anyone feeling the spirit of the giving season, contributions to the Hershey Miyamura Scholarship Fund can be sent to Miyamura High School, 680 South Boardman Avenue, Gallup, NM 87301.

Find more information about Travelin' Jack at www.travelinjack.com.

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