

## **Mega-kennel planned for St. Johns County as K-9s for Warriors expands across country**

October 9, 2019  
By Ellen Schneider

When [Rory Diamond](#) joined K9s for Warriors in 2015, the nonprofit had just moved to its new location on K-9 Road. He was only the 13th employee, and their budget was only \$600,000.

Now, K9s for Warriors now has 111 employees across five states and will raise about \$15 million in 2019.

As K9s for Warriors continues to expand, it will open a new 5.5-acre mega-kennel off of U.S. Route 1 as well as a facility in San Antonio.

The Route 1 campus will house up to 250 dogs. Roughly two years ago, the organization expanded their campus to double their capacity from 30 to 60 dogs, but Diamond says it's still not enough.

The tract of land — donated by the Davis family and [the PARC Group](#) — is located at the intersection of U.S. Route 1 and Racetrack Road/Nocatee Parkway in Ponte Vedra, less than a mile from the current campus. The project will break ground in fall of 2019.

“It’ll be the hub of our dog world for at least a decade,” said Diamond.

The new campus will include a training center, veterinarian technician kennel, among other features. “We’ll be able to do a lot more and help a lot more warriors,” Diamond said.

On average, training a service dog costs between \$55,000 and \$80,000, but K-9s for Warriors is doing it for about \$25,000. It takes approximately three to six months to train each dog, depending on the type of dog and their background.

“By scaling, by getting bigger, we’ve shown that we can hit economies of scale,” Diamond said. Fundraising is a big piece of the puzzle. Another large part is the campus — being able to show people what they do and how they do it.

K9s for Warriors has had 580 graduates and only one suicide.

"I think once we got over the hump of looking like we were legitimate, and we knew what we were doing and got all the studies back from Purdue University proving that it worked, we become the nation's leader at this," Diamond said, adding that fundraising started coming a bit easier.

The Purdue partnership researches the benefits of service dogs for veterans with PTSD and suicidal tendencies.

K9s for Warriors goes about fundraising in a few ways. Diamond says they apply for a lot of grants to foundations, and each dog is sponsored — with a nine-month waitlist for sponsoring the dogs.

They also take a lot of small-dollar donations and partake in corporate partnerships, including ones with Petco, who gave \$2 million so that K9s for Warriors could expand to San Antonio. There's also been a lot of local support for the organization, including from the Weavers, who previously owned the Jacksonville Jaguars.

As well as housing and training the dogs, K9s for Warriors houses veterans while they learn how to handle the dogs and provides support before and after the veterans are on campus. They hope to keep veterans engaged and offer support in everything from trouble with the dogs to suicidal thoughts.

"Eighty seven percent of our warriors have what we call suicidal ideation, meaning they think about killing themselves at least twice in any given week. It goes to 14 percent after have a dog for at least six months," Diamond said. "It's a huge change."