

BUSINESS IN THE BLUFF



The Healing Power of Animals

By Jill Ferguson

“It was Ripley, my yellow Lab’s, idea,” explains Mihaila “Mihi” Djonova. “I started having anxiety attacks in corporate life, and Ripley started to act as my therapist on his own, like animals do. That’s when I realized the 1 FUR 1 Foundation was needed.”

Djonova, who lives on Redondo near Vista with her husband Erik, their son, and their Great Dane Willow (who placed first in the 2022 BHNA Halloween costume competition), launched her nonprofit with Ripley in 2014. [1 FUR 1 Foundation](#) is 100% volunteer-run, and its mission is to create, nurture, and expand animal-assisted therapeutic programs throughout the United States. Ripley loved elderly people, so he and Djonova volunteered with memory care patients. The results were phenomenal.

One woman, Djonova explains, went from being able to stay with them mentally for only 20 seconds to being able to focus for more than 10 minutes over the time she worked with them. 1 FUR 1 Foundation [works with partner organizations](#) to provide canine advocates for children who are crime victims who must testify in court, to help first responders and medical staff overcome burn-out and fatigue with Newfoundland therapy dogs, to help autistic children with physical and cognitive challenges through a program that uses mini therapy horses, and to help veterans and their families as well as dementia and Alzheimer’s patients.

1 FUR 1 Foundation [provides](#) grants and strategic and financial support (such as strategic planning, market research, and logistical and technological assistance) to its partner organizations, and 100% of their budget comes from donations, events, and contracts. They receive no government or state funding.

Djonova stresses that their organization is completely virtual and volunteer-based, and that they keep their costs to a minimum so that the bulk of their money goes to the programs they support. “We provide 360-degree support, as opposed to being transactional,” she says.

For example, the programs they currently support include canine companions that assist children in Michigan and Ohio who have been assaulted and must testify in



court. In Florida, they support a woman who is active-duty Air Force and runs a mini-horse therapy program for veterans. In Tennessee, South Carolina, and North Carolina, they support the Newfoundland therapy dog program, which is focused on medical staff and first responders.

Their volunteers have specialized skillsets, such as a CFO. “I’m always on the lookout for volunteers,” Djonova says, “especially ones with director-level and above” experience who can donate a couple of hours every month as a mentor in a long-term commitment, since their program is structured and based on longevity. Here is the [link](#) to other volunteer opportunities with 1 FUR 1, including Cause Ambassador, Charity Rainmaker, Word Composer, and Marketing Manager.

Djonova has partnered with a developer to create a new software program for all therapeutic animal nonprofits to track their impact.

The software will even run a cognitive test before and after the therapy visits to get a better grasp of the animals’ impact. “The system will help us get to the next level and pull things together,” Djonova says, “and it will be provided at no cost to 1 FUR 1 program partners.”

As a result, one of the greatest needs 1 FUR 1 Foundation has this month is for 14 people to donate \$30 per month to cover the annual fees and upkeep for this software system. If you’re looking for an organization to get involved with or to donate to a nonprofit for a year-end tax deduction, consider 1 FUR 1. Your donation will make a difference in the lives of children, first responders and medical staff, veterans, and people with memory issues. [Click here](#) to donate today.

Djonova runs her 501(c)3 foundation from her house. She said they love living in the Bluff Heights neighborhood because of the houses, the character, and the diverse group of people that make up what she calls “a realistic slice of life.” She said they chose to live here because they want a safe and realistic environment in which to raise their son. And Bluff Heights gives them just that.

Jill Ferguson is an artist, best-selling author, coach, consultant, entrepreneur, and founder of Women’s Wellness Weekends. She lives in Bluff Heights with her husband, Rick Heckt, and their very smart dog Coconut and very energetic dog Casper.

