

Who is THAT Junior Handler?

-AKC Field Representative, Joe Reinhardt

Whether attending a Retriever Hunt Test as an AKC Rep, judging a hunt test, handling dogs or



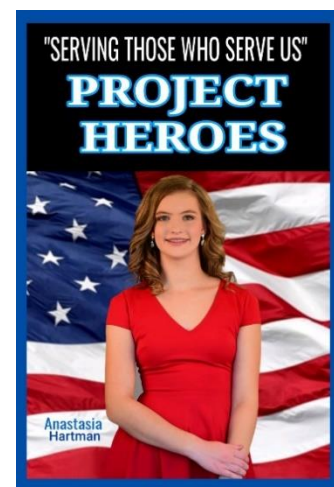
helping host a hunt test, I always keep an eye out for Junior Handlers. I like to help them get their paperwork completed, give them a Junior Handler pin from AKC and to chat with them about their experiences with the dogs. The discussions are quite interesting and reveal amazing things about these young dog handlers. That is exactly what happened at the Sierra Nevada Retriever Club this spring. While chatting with a Junior Handler, I realized I was talking to an amazing person.

Meet 14-year old Anastasia Hartman of Red Bluff, California. She handled two dogs at the event in the Junior stake. One is her American Water Spaniel and the other a Yellow Lab that is normally handled by her uncle, a pro trainer in Northern California. Her handling of the dogs with confidence and professionalism is in itself, impressive. However, Like Paul Harvey's "Rest of the Story" it became apparent that this is an amazing young lady. I chatted with her after the ribbon ceremony and she gave me a rundown of the accomplishments she has completed at her young age. After hearing her story, I asked her to stand up and share her story

with the crowd at our Saturday night barbeque. She graciously gave a brief and humble version of her background. The crowd was captivated by her short speech and gave her a round of applause.

Anastasia started a Foundation called Project Heroes in addition to handling dogs in the AKC Retriever Hunt Test program and other activities typical of a teenager. Here is her story provided by her very proud mother Wendy Hartman:

"Anastasia (Ana) started her project when she was 7 years old. She started by asking her Grandpa if she could raise chickens on the ranch to help feed the homeless. She wanted to feed the homeless as a way to try and help homeless veterans. Ana's Dad and one of her Grandpas are disabled veterans, both with PTSD. She has seen the effects of PTSD on people she loves and wanted to find a way to help. For about a year she raised chickens and donated eggs to the homeless meal program every Saturday at the local city park. One day we



came home and a coyote had slaughtered all her chickens. So, she asked if she could find a way to help just veterans.

A couple of weeks later she asked if we could adopt a veteran family for Christmas. Of course we said yes and went down to our local National guard and asked if they knew of a couple of families in need. We received a list with over 100 names of children who were going to have a parent deployed with the 649th just before Christmas.



This is how Project Heroes got started. A little brown eyed girl looked up at us and said "Mommy and Daddy do you think we could get a toy for all of those kids? I know what it's like to have daddy gone and I would like to make their Christmas even better". At that point we knew that we needed to help her make her goal! We set money aside in case she needed help to reach her goal. Ana was so determined that she talked to businesses and City Councils and the American Legion. She even attended a school board meeting and got the entire school district to put a box in every classroom to raise toys for these military kids. In her first year she was able to raise enough for almost 400 toys for the children and she even raised enough for 14 full, complete meal baskets that were delivered to lower enlisted soldiers' families in the national guard. Ana was 8 years old and this marked the first official year of Project Heroes.

In the years to follow Ana has delivered to countless amounts of Veteran families as well as disaster relief. In 2017, there was a tragic shooting at Rancho Tehama School. There were a couple of boys and parents injured. Ana in addition to Project Heroes, took on project Ranch Tehama. She raised funds for gifts, meals baskets. All of the injured kids and their families received toys and meal baskets. For each injured child and their siblings, Ana raised the funds to provide a bicycle and a helmet. Ana said that this shooting didn't just affect the kids that were shot, it affected their whole family.



In 2018, Ana took on 26 military families. All 26 families were fire victims from the Carr, Stole, or Camp fires that happened in Northern California. The Stole fire was right in our hometown and a local police officer lost his home while he was out fighting the fire. Ana provided a full Christmas for that family including gifts, bikes, helmets, and meal

basket. In addition, Ana spoke with Senator Neilson and he helped rent out Cal Skate in Chico California for 300 kids from Paradise; a community that was essentially totally destroyed by the Camp Fire. These kids received a party, a new blanket, new pajamas, and a new board game as well as many other donated items.

In 2019 and 2020, Ana took on the northern California Veterans home as part of her project with 140 residents as well as a local assisted living home that houses many veterans. When Ana was 13 in 2020, she turned her project into an actual corporation and is currently working to fund the filing for her 501c. Her future goals are to someday make her project a National Foundation.

Ana wanted to eventually add guided duck hunts to her project to take out wounded veterans or children of fallen veterans who don't have that parent available to take them on hunting trips. This is how Ana got involved with the AKC. We purchased Ana an American Water



Spaniel and she fell in love with the dogs and the sport! We purchased a second AWS and she now plans to become a future breeder of this breed. This girl is HOOKED on the sport!

In addition to Ana's volunteer work she is a competitive dancer practicing in all styles. She is also currently Miss Ag America JR Teen for 2 years running. Her platform projects for Miss Ag America JR Teen are the Project Heroes and veteran awareness as well as promoting hunting and logging. Ana is now 14 years old.

After handling her dogs in the second Junior Hunting Test of the weekend, Ana was off and running. With a quick adjustment to her hair

and a wardrobe change, Ana and her mother were headed to Roseville, California for a dance competition. Ana's dedication to her Foundation and her extracurricular activities goes hand in hand with the dedication needed to effectively train and handle retrievers. Who knows what lies around the corner in Ana's life. I have a feeling that no matter what she pursues, Ana will be highly successful. Kudos to Ana's family for providing the guidance and support for her.

Ana's story is just one example of the incredible stories you will hear from the Junior Handlers. I have talked to an 8-year old boy that trained his own dog and an autistic young man who blossomed from training and handling dogs. Next time you see a Junior Handler at a hunting test, take the time to have a chat with them. You will be amazed at what you hear.

