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Dogs that serve honored in Hartsdale

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HARTSDALE - The plantings near the headstones said it all.

Orange and yellow marigolds, pink and orange impatiens, and purple petunias all were in full bloom as if to prove the eternal love many pet owners felt for their dearly departed.

But among the thousands of headstones at the Hartsdale Pet Cemetery, one stands out.

The War Dog Memorial - a bronze German shepherd on a large granite rock - was built in 1923 and was the first memorial to pay tribute to the 7,000 dogs that served in World War I, said Edward Martin III, vice president of the cemetery.

Some 100 people turned up at the Hartsdale Pet Cemetery yesterday to pay homage to canines who served during wartime as well as pets who have been of service to humanity, including police and fire dogs.

"This is the crown jewel of our cemetery," Martin said. "About 25 years ago, we decided to expand the tribute to include all pets helpful to mankind."

Yesterday's celebration was in partnership with the Tower of Hope, a nonprofit organization focused on providing service dogs to combat-wounded veterans, and Shelter Pet Alliance Inc., a nonprofit group that arranges large adoption events for animal shelters.

Sgt. David Nastry of the Army National Guard, a board member of Tower of Hope, spoke about the valuable role trained service dogs can play in the lives of veterans.

"Many of our soldiers are coming back with amputations and blindness. For them, opening a door or picking something off the floor can become a monumental challenge," Nastry said. "The dogs, who are trained, can really help them live for the rest of their lives."

The cemetery, where nearly 70,000 pets are interred, opened in 1896, when Dr. Samuel Johnson, a Manhattan veterinarian, offered his rural Westchester apple orchard as a burial plot for a bereaved woman's dog.

The event also hosted Shelter Pet Alliance's Pet Adoption Day, which brought many dogs and cats from local shelters for adoption.

Maureen Teige of Tuckahoe ducked in and out of tents with her four daughters, ranging in age from 6 to 10.

"That black Lab looks really cute," she said, pointing to 3-month-old Brandy, who was being walked on a leash. "Three of my daughters want a dog, but one of them really, really wants a kitten. So we'll see."
