



HEARTS 4 HEROES USA

Founded by First Responders for First Responders!

Board of Directors

Shelley Martell - Co Founder & Director

Meet the Firecracker Behind the Heroes

Shelley Martell is the Founder and Director of Hearts 4 Heroes USA. If you know Shelley, you know she is compassionate to a fault, never seems to hear the word “no,” and never does anything without passion.

A former published interior designer with a 35-year career and both national and local sponsorships, Shelley understands what it takes to take an idea, build support around it, and turn it into something bigger. Today, she brings that same drive and determination to what has become her most important mission: supporting our heroes.

Shelley is a force and is fiercely respected for her unwavering commitment to first responder wellness. Alongside her husband, Bruce Martell—her hero and a first responder of 40 years—she co-founded Hearts 4 Heroes USA, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the mental health and emotional wellness of first responders through the healing power of specially trained therapy dogs.

Together, Shelley and Bruce have helped build an organization focused on providing innovative wellness support for firefighters, law enforcement officers, EMS personnel, dispatchers, and other frontline heroes.

The Story Behind Her “Why”

Shelley’s passion for serving first responders was inspired by the extraordinary bond between her family’s beloved dog, Scooby, and the first responder community.

She witnessed firsthand the emotional toll the job could take on her husband and saw the difference Scooby’s presence could make during some of his most difficult moments. Watching her hero struggle made the mission deeply personal. Shelley knew there had to be something she could do—something that could make a difference and potentially save lives.

What began as a deeply personal experience evolved into a mission and, ultimately, what Shelley describes as a movement.

That vision became the foundation of Hearts 4 Heroes USA and its Paw Platoon Placement Program, which places highly trained therapy dogs within first responder agencies to provide comfort, emotional support, and assistance surrounding critical incidents and crises.

Through the Paw Platoon, the bond Shelley first witnessed within her own family has grown into something capable of reaching first responders, departments, and communities across the country.

Turning a Mission Into a Movement

Under Shelley's leadership, Hearts 4 Heroes USA has expanded its reach across multiple states, placing therapy dogs with fire departments, law enforcement agencies, and peer support teams while building partnerships with community organizations, businesses, and public safety leaders.

Her commitment to reducing the stigma surrounding mental health has helped create opportunities for first responders to access support, build resilience, and strengthen connections with their peers.

Known for her compassionate leadership, tireless advocacy, and unwavering dedication, Shelley has become a respected voice for first responder wellness. She continues to lead the organization's strategic growth, community outreach, fundraising initiatives, volunteer engagement, and educational efforts, always ensuring Hearts 4 Heroes USA remains focused on its mission of serving those who serve others.

For Shelley, hearing "no" has never meant the end of an idea. If she believes something can help a first responder, it simply means finding another way forward.

A Lifelong Love of Animals

Shelley also credits her upbringing for her deep love of animals. Her father had an extraordinary way with dogs—someone she describes as being like "Cesar Millan before Cesar Millan."

Over the course of her life, Shelley has shared her world with 17 dogs and many other animals, each contributing in some way to her understanding of the connection people can have with their pets. Her sons have always shared that love of animals and were part of the reason Scooby, along with many other beloved animals, became part of their family.

Today, life on the farm feels like a full-circle moment in the journey back to her "why."

Shelley has always advocated for the extraordinary power animals can have in people's lives. She often lovingly refers to them as "God's Dogs"—a reflection of her belief that sometimes they seem to know exactly when someone needs them most.

One First Responder, One Family, One Dog at a Time

At the heart of everything Shelley does is a simple belief: every hero deserves hope, healing, and support.

What began with her family, her first responder husband, and one extraordinary dog has grown into a mission much larger than any of them could have imagined.

Through Shelley's leadership and the continued work of Hearts 4 Heroes USA, that mission continues to transform lives—one first responder, one family, and one therapy dog at a time—while helping create stronger, healthier communities across the nation.