



Mary Free Bed[®]
Rehabilitation

Press Release

July 21, 2026

New Hire Reporting for Duty: Meet Winton, Mary Free Bed's Newest PAWS AAT Dog

Grand Rapids, Michigan — There's a new four-legged team member making the rounds at Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation, and he's already turning heads and winning big.

Meet Winton, a lovable, goofy golden retriever who has officially joined the Mary Free Bed Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) Program through Paws With A Cause (PAWS). While he may be known for his fabulous fluff and friendly disposition, Winton has an important job to do: he helps patients reach their therapy goals during rehabilitation.

Thanks to the generosity of the Grand Rapids-based furniture company Custer, Inc., Winton joins fellow PAWS facility dog Faith, working alongside rehabilitation professionals to encourage, motivate and comfort patients throughout their recovery. Winton helps patients practice real-world skills in a rehabilitation setting. He can help patients achieve their mobility goals and support strength-building activities like brushing his coat or tossing a tennis ball. He even gives patients in speech therapy a reason to practice verbal commands. Winton turns challenging therapy sessions into moments of connection, confidence and celebration.

Before he ever stepped paw into the hospital, Winton spent more than two years mastering specialized skills through PAWS. He learned to stay calm around wheelchairs, walkers and busy clinical environments while developing the gentle temperament that makes him the perfect rehabilitation partner. Now, he's ready to put those skills, and his winning personality, to work.

Animal-assisted therapy is a structured, evidence-based therapy approach that integrates specially trained dogs into rehabilitation sessions to support physical, emotional and cognitive goals. At Mary Free Bed, AAT dogs work alongside certified recreational therapists to help patients improve mobility, coordination and communication while reducing stress and increasing engagement during care. Patients often walk farther, speak more confidently and stay motivated longer when working with a therapy dog.

“Animal-assisted therapy allows us to meet patients where they are, both physically and emotionally,” said Maria Besta, CTRS, director of integrative therapies and adaptive recreation. “Winton plays an active role in therapy sessions, helping patients improve mobility, communication and endurance while reducing anxiety and increasing engagement. He’s not just a comforting presence; he’s part of the care team.”

Winton’s addition allows Mary Free Bed to expand its Animal-Assisted Therapy Program, reaching more patients across inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation settings. Therapy dogs like Winton provide a unique kind of support—one that blends clinical purpose with meaningful human connection.

“We’re proud to continue our partnership with Mary Free Bed and expand a program that makes such a meaningful difference for patients,” said Michele Suchovsky, CEO of Paws With A Cause. “Every PAWS dog is intentionally selected and trained to meet the needs of the people they’ll serve. Winton’s temperament, skill set and personality make him a natural fit for the rehabilitation environment, and we’re excited to see the impact he’ll have alongside this care team.”

About Paws With A Cause

Since 1979, Paws With A Cause (PAWS) has been transforming lives and strengthening communities through partnerships with custom-trained working dogs. PAWS assistance and facility dogs have helped thousands of people thrive, providing opportunities to live with independence, confidence and companionship. Serving more than 20 states across the country, PAWS is accredited by Assistance Dogs International and Animal Assisted Services International. To learn more, visit pawswithacause.org.

About Mary Free Bed

Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation is a not-for-profit, internationally accredited and nationally recognized leader in rehabilitation. What started with a single bed in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1891 has grown to a rehabilitation system with more than 2,500 team members across 70 locations in Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Virginia and West Virginia. Last year, Mary Free Bed restored hope and freedom through rehabilitation for more than 120,000 children and adults. With more than 120 specialized medical and sports rehabilitation programs and an exclusive focus on rehabilitation, our specialized teams help patients achieve extraordinary clinical results. *U.S. News & World Report* and *Newsweek* rate Mary Free Bed as a national Best Rehabilitation Hospital for 2025-26. To learn more or schedule care, visit maryfreebed.com.