**KEYNOTE SPEECH FOR**

**ED SHERNOFF**

Hello everyone!!! That was **SOME** introduction!! ***(If you want to make a joke, you can say either, "is my tail wagging?" Or "If I had a tail it would REALLY be wagging right now!!!"***) It's great to be here to speak about one of my favorite subjects. While I'm sure that in many ways all of us feel that the world has "gone to the dogs," to us at Circle Tail that's the ultimate praise. The work done by this fine organization and it's humans exemplifies the true meaning of **partnership, resourcefulness and resilience**. I'm proud to speak to you and your presence here tonight tells me that each one of you has the heart, soul and respect for the work we do here. There is a place for participation for everyone interested in supporting Circle Tail and we look forward to hearing from **you** as we discover the ways to expand the positive impact of this wonderful organization. I would like to acknowledge and thank \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ ***(is this Marlys?***) for giving me the opportunity to share my experience with Circle Tail and you'll see very soon why the work done here means so much, on so many levels to so many-people and animals alike.

Circle Tail was founded in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ by Marlys Staley, a certified master dog trainer and former physical therapist and ultra marathoner, She saw a need and applied her professional skills, focus and compassion to form a means and a context to give of herself and her expertise to assist others. In the past \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years, Marlys and Circle Tail have placed thousands of dogs while providing transformative experiences for all concerned.

In preparing my thoughts for today, the phrase that kept running through my head was **"Best Gig EVER**." To know this organization is to love it, so let me give you an idea of who we are, what we do and why the work is so unique. The mission of this organization is to find, train and donate service dogs to people who really need them- those that are physically challenged or hearing impaired. Our service dogs are NOT seeing eye dogs. Here at Circle Tail, we realize the need for well trained, attentive, devoted service animals goes way beyond the once traditional parameters. We rescue animals from many sources. Whether from shelters, family turn-ins, breeder donations, and whatever other sources, we affirm the importance of dogs in our lives, our natural synergy, and the potential strength and magic of partnership. Our "clients" tend to be mostly Labs, Golden retrievers, German shepherds, and hybrids of these noble and loyal breeds. Each dog is evaluated for its potential as a service dog; those with less of the needed temperament are offered for adoption. Rather than employ trainers to work with the dogs, Circle Tail goes one step further and we work with three Ohio prisons. We train the prisoners to train the dogs. Talk about rehabilitation!!! Programs like the ones organized and supported by Circle Tail provide invaluable opportunities to the clients, prisoners and animals alike. The sense of self worth and dignity in every phase of the process inspire all of us that are involved. To hear how the prisoners find a new and positive purpose is really moving and to know that they have contributed to the quality of someone's existence in a constructive way is life affirming. To hear what some of the prisoners have to say really drives home the impact that Circle Tail has on all of us. One man named Victor, an inmate, related part of his story. He told of how he had a pregnant dog to watch over and here's what happened. He said, "It was the first time pups were born in that prison! It was a hot summer in that cell and I missed chow a lot but I wouldn’t change the experience for anything! Circle Tail helped change my life and I haven’t been back to prison. I went from a violent man who could hurt you at a drop of a dime to a man who is now a Christian. My days are not all good but I deal with them with what I learned from the dogs." Apparently some possibly overused expressions have new meaning when related to the impressive work done at Circle Tail. Thanks to Victor's story and many others like it, we can see that we can view old cliches with new perspective. Sayings like "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" and "working like a dog" become busted myths.... In the most rewarding of ways, and "every dog has its day" now has a powerful, positive, and rewarding connotation.

Before I tell you about my story with Circle Tail, I'm curious. I want to know...by a show of hands:

* How many of you currently own a dog?
* Okay, now how many of those people are currently **OWNED** by that dog??? Good!!! I had a feeling it was this way!! ***(wait for the laugh***)
* How many of you have one dog?
* Two?
* Three or more? Wow....***(if you want to make a joke you can say... "Interesting...none of you are wearing black!!! Makes sense!!!"***)
* Just out of curiosity.... Any cat owners in the crowd?? ***(Here you can say if it applies... "It figures....there you are-over here in the corner... Checking on your grooming and being just a little aloof and independent!!!"***)

Now that I have a sense of who's here with us tonight, I can share how my journey with Circle Tail began, because, let's face it. We're all too busy. We're busier than we ever thought we would possibly be. We're jammed and over-scheduled and way too invested in hyperventilating and then..... As the French would say.... The **"Coup de foudre**" or **"thunderclap**" Boom!!!! One look at those big puppy dog eyes and the observer is TOAST..... However, in MY case, my wife didn't take the bait quite so fast.... ***(Blink your eyes and wait for the laugh***). Many years ago, we lost our beloved chocolate Lab named \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Anyone who has lost a pet knows of the hole left in your home, your heart and your day to day existence. We waited a considerable amount of time and I suggested to my wife that it was time to get another dog. ..... This is the part where those "puppy dog eyes" didn't quite work......yet. She looked at me like I was out of my mind and for confirmation, she asked if I was absolutely crazy. She just wasn't into the thought of having another dog. Her reasoning was that the kids were grown up and out of the house, we were traveling more, and she didn't want the responsibility of caring for another pet. Apparently, I might be enough of a handful!!! ***(Wait for the laugh***) Of course she had valid points, but as anyone besotted by the love and companionship of a four-legged bundle of joy knows.....not so easy to give up having that again. My puppy dog pleading must have morphed into a more determined gaze, because she began to see my point..... And she grew increasingly concerned. Of course the incessant protesting, begging, pleading and promising probably helped to wear her down....and once she stopped laughing, I saw that she was serious. Uh oh. What could I do? Well....what would any devoted husband of thirty-five years do? Yup!!! I got a little sneaky and devised a plan. It took me a while to do the research but I eventually found Circle Tail. Under the umbrella of "doggie rental" so to speak, it might not seem so permanent or daunting to have a dog in the house again. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years and thirteen dogs later.... That would be fourteen sets of puppy dog eyes (including mine) focused on melting Elaine's heart. She's STILL trying to figure out what happened!!!! But in the meantime, together we've spread the love, received more than we gave, and made a tremendous, positive and much needed contribution to the lives of many souls.

Who would ever forget anyone named Sandra? She was the love of my life.....canine version. Each dog has left an indelible and precious mark on our hearts and memories and our lives are so much richer for having the honor to live with them- even for a little while sometimes. Sandy was our first and demonstrates one of the strong points of the foster program in conjunction with the Circle Tails Assistance Dog Training Program. We fostered Sandy for a total of five times in eight months. I'll mention more about the fostering program in a little while, but our experience with Sandy, especially that one really significant AHA moment, serves to show the power of the connection that is possible with these dogs. I remember when I first completed my volunteer profile, I was asked for the areas in which I might be interested in working. Public speaking sounded good, right? I figured school groups, maybe little library sessions or small organizations...did I even think of keynote speeches to 250 respected and important members of the community? NAH!!!! "Note to self..... Consider the possibilities.....ALL possibilities!!!!" ***(Wait for the laugh***). I'll never forget one of my first presentations with Sandy was at the Boone County Library. We were to speak to a multiple sclerosis support group. We pulled into the parking lot ***(if you want, you can say, "I was driving.... These dogs are good, but they're not THAT good!" And wait for the laugh***). We got out of the car and near us was a woman that was being helped into a wheelchair. She appeared to be in her mid fifties and looked sad and somewhat lost and forlorn, and as luck would have it, we got to share the elevator on the way to the lobby where the event was to take place. Then, as if intuitively, she turned and saw Sandy, and instantly beamed a smile that would have melted anyone. Of course Sandy, being the lover that she was, instantly reacted and returned some much needed love. It was an amazing sight to behold- one I will never forget. Of course I probably just incriminated myself- at the time, Sandy was wearing her "working clothes." Service dogs wearing vests are not supposed to be touched or petted unless permission has been granted, but the incident was so heartwarming and so memorable, that I had to share it. Let's just hope that Marlys is out of ear shot or I might be in big trouble....retroactively!!! ***(Wait for the laugh***)

Sandy was really there for us in so many ways. Back then, in the Sandy era, Elaine and I had a chance to go skiing in northern Michigan. Great idea, right? Well, to my twenty year old brain it seemed like a fine idea until my sixty year old knees chose to have a mind of their own. To make a long story short, my "excellent" idea of skiing under the lift did not go over well with those more mature knees, and, you guessed it. SNAP. CRACKLE. POP. and no breakfast cereal in sight. I wound up out of commission and needed to recuperate for four months (thanks, knees) and after the down time I came right back to this very room and who was there, **fresh out of prison** and needing a foster home ***(you can say, "I know this phrase sounds unique, but we're used to it around here"***) but my Sandy. One tilt of that head and I melted, and we were together again.

And then, in the autumn of 2011, there was Bristol. A big, beautiful, standard poodle. A sight to behold....except maybe to a guy from Brooklyn who grew up in the 50's and 60's near Coney Island, Nathan's hotdogs, and all things **macho**. Where I came from, poodles had bows and nail polish and any self respecting guy from "da hood" didn't associate with poodles...unless they were on a girlfriend's skirt. When Marlys asked me to foster Bristol, although my head reminded me this is what I signed up for, my gut was still on Coney Island Avenue, and I just could NOT picture myself walking a sculpted ball of fluff...no matter HOW big she was. Well, I knew I had to do my duty, but also know this...every time I had to walk Bristol, out came my incognito look, hoodie and all. Ironically, it was my two cats that rescued me from the situation. It turns out that Bristol was a "chaser" and my cats were her "cocktail," so it was back to Circle Tail for her!!

Then there was Gatlin. When we first met, he was fairly advanced in his training process and he was a bright, alert, and energetic dog. We all have our foibles and Gatlin was no exception. His thing? He, too, LOVED to chase things... Even more!!! Birds, squirrels, rabbits...you name it, he was on it. You might have imagined by now that this instinct is probably not the best one to possess while working with people in wheelchairs, so Marlys asked if I would foster Gatlin and see if I could possibly desensitize him somewhat. Well, Gatlin won. Bruce Springsteen may have been "born to run," but Gatlin was "born to chase." Thanks to the wonderful relationships Marlys has throughout the canine community, and thanks to the efforts of Gene and Sherri \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Of K9 Resources, Gatlin is now fulfilling his potential as a scent dog, sniffing out and chasing down bombs!! These dogs never cease to amaze me and always inspire me!!

There have been over a dozen dogs in our home and in our hearts. We currently have \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and the beat! or the bark! goes on.... And with each dog, we learn more about them, life, ourselves, and dogs in general. We've also learned the LAWS of DOGGIE PROPERTY. They go something like this:

1. It's mine.
2. If I like it, it's mine
3. If it's in my mouth it's mine.
4. If I ever had it or seemed to ever want it, it's mine.
5. If it's chewed up, all the pieces are mine,
6. If it's broken it's yours.
7. If there is any question as to whom something belongs, revert to item one. ***(Wait for the laugh***)

They really get us. They understand who we are and they live to serve us...as long as we understand the world is theirs. Yes, doggone it, it is a dog's life. And we're so lucky to be in it!! Is it difficult to give them up once the fostering period is over? Of course it is, but we are always aware of what we've signed up for. We're aware that our commitment of love, caring and hospitality goes a long way to contributing to the well being of the dog and ultimately the client who is fortunate enough to have his or her life transformed by the presence of these wonderful, dedicated animals. There's an expression that we've probably all heard and that is that people come into our lives for a season, a reason, or a lifetime. At Circle Tail, more often than not, the animals are with us for a season, whatever that might be in each case, we know the reason, and their spirit often stays with us for a lifetime. Each dog trains us and teaches us and I wouldn't have it any other way. I recently saw a posting on a social media site. The basic message was that if you love something, let it be. If you picked flower because you love it, it dies. It's kind of similar with the dogs we foster. The saying goes on to tell us that love is not about possession, it's about **appreciation**. These dogs have been given a very special destiny and we are facilitators along their route to fulfillment. Sometimes a purpose is higher than satisfying our own desires. We choose to volunteer at and contribute to Circle Tail because Marlys and the entire team are doing an amazing and much needed job in this world and they deserve to grow the trajectory of the excellent work that is being done.

Hillary may have popularized the old African proverb, "it takes a village....." And although it originally pertained to raising a child, it takes a village of volunteers to raise, train and place the dogs at Circle Tail. And the process takes about two years for each dog. I'd like to take another quick poll. By a show of hands, who in this room is a Circle Tail volunteer? Great!! Now, where are the foster parents? Super!! Let's see .... where's the adoption committee? The kennel assistants? And who's on the board?? It's great to see so many of you here supporting us tonight, but for those of you who are guests, this is a fraction of the possible volunteer positions open for someone like **YOU**. There are potential openings in so many areas, but I'll give you just an idea of some of the categories where you might find your calling:

* In adoptions, you might be a committee member or a coordinator
* Board members in business development are always needed and the board of directors can surely use people in PR and marketing and a nonprofit attorney would really help us too.
* The Capital campaign is looking for committee leaders and marketing coordinators
* And don't forget the dogs!!! They need care givers, groomers, people to walk them, and trainers.
* We need people to volunteer in fund raising, special events, kennel care, and loads of other essential and worthwhile support areas for the dogs, clients, and organization.

Tennis great Arthur Ashe once said, "from what we get we can make a living, but from what we give, we can make a **LIFE**." I invite all if you to see how life can be enriched through service to this organization.

I have to also say that in volunteering with Circle Tail, I find myself asking, quite frequently, what more can I do? What do i think is really needed by the beneficiaries and members of this great organization from my vantage point? I find my connection to Circle Tail so rewarding. The work is fascinating. I learn about myself, my own personal limitations, how to stretch beyond them..... Like fostering a **big poodle** or, for instance, **tonight** ***(wait for the laugh***) and I know that my contribution has real value... By enforcing the mission of Circle Tail, by giving homes to these amazing animals as they need them, and by supporting our clients in having viable and more actively engaged lives than ever before. I know that my enthusiasm for this organization is not isolated. I know that others want to make a contribution and I have a feeling that **YOU** do as well.

I took a look and realized that there's many ways each one of us can support Circle Tail. I see so many areas where seemingly small gestures can mean so much, and the more I do, the more I WANT to do. I realized that as a grandfather, I have two wonderful grandchildren, both of whom live outside of Cincinnati. One is in Columbus and the other is in Virginia, and obviously both require long trips, but the question that arises is... "What do we do with the dogs?" If necessary, I could leave the dogs with Circle Tail, but I'm here to ease the burden and not create more work. This led me to initiate an email tree for foster parents and their dogs who are either looking for temporary babysitting or can provide babysitting services for those with obligations that take them out of town, one that will allow support from within the volunteer community rather than place added stress on Marlys and the actual facility. I have also had business cards created for Circle Tail... Spreading the word, one card at a time!! There's a box on each table, please take some, keep one for yourself, and continue to share the word about this wonderful organization and the good work being done here!! As you look at these cards, think of how **YOU** might be willing to contribute to this great cause.

We're all so happy to see so many of you here tonight and by being here, consider yourselves as invited to the "inner circle" of Circle Tail!! These events are a great way to really bring the message to new and receptive friends. There are other ways to learn about the work we do as well.... In this era of rampant social connectivity, we're there! In fact, we can be found on many sites!! You can always find us at [www.circletail.org](http://www.circletail.org). You can visit our facebook page...if you're not sure how to find us, you can ask your kids to help!! We're on Instagram too...forget about Grumpy Cat and Boss the French Bulldog...who by the way is Swedish... You want cute puppies?? We've GOT cute puppies... Right here in Cincinnati...and they're very excited to meet you!! One look from their big puppy dog eyes and you too, will be toast!! Remember the importance of providing foster homes for these great dogs...and by the way, poodles are really smart!! Fluffy but smart!! ***(Wait for the laugh***)

I hope I've succeeded in giving you a little slice of what life is like and can be like through involvement with Circle Tail. I hope you've had an opportunity to imagine where your undiscovered talents might be with regard to volunteering here. Just remember.....that little fleeting "oh no!! Not me!! flash of a thought that you just had is probably the catalyst that will encourage you to join us. think of the clients whose lives will be immeasurably improved. Think of the potential rehabilitation of the prisoners who really learn the meaning of giving back. Think of the dogs that can really use homes and love in between their "prison gigs." And think of YOU. Think of the ways in which you might stretch beyond your previous limits. Think of the contributions you can offer. Think of the real difference you can make. And then think of those wet noses and puppy dog eyes.....remember that my wife Elaine eventually melted!!! ***(Wait for the laugh***) and remember it wasn't only Charlie Brown that thought that "happiness is a warm puppy." We agree. We look forward to seeing you soon!! Thank you all!!