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Graduates Share What They Have Gained After Losing Their Vision

There is no limit to their 'can do'

When one loses his or her vision, it's a natural response to focus on the loss. Not just for the person who has lost his or her sight but for those who know or meet a blind or visually impaired person.

Our graduates inspire us every day with their eagerness to learn new skills, positive outlooks and can-do attitudes. We asked our graduates to share with us what they have gained after losing their vision. Some of the many responses we received are below:

"...blindness has given me the world!"

"As I compose this message, I am sitting in a chalet in the Ardennes region of Belgium on a two-week tour. Since my diagnosis, I've visited Australia, Central America, the Caribbean and now Europe. So you could say blindness has given me the world! I've heard '...but you can't!' so many times, my automatic response is now, 'Challenge accepted!' I travel solo, I make my own arrangements — both for myself and my guide dog Tucker — and I enjoy many of the same activities that sighted people do when I travel."

— Karl W. Mundstock

"I've gained more insight into myself, as well as others. I'm more aware of what's going on around me. I hear the birds sing, the water run, smell the scent of flowers and what's cooking. The greatest thing of all is I can sense people's feelings without seeing their faces and all of this is a gift and a blessing in my life along with my guide dog, Havana."

— Donna Bennett

[Graduates Share](#) continued on page 2 »

Message From The President



It's hard to believe that it has been almost a year since I assumed my role as president of GDA, one of the country's premier guide dog schools.

This year, construction was completed on our state-of-the-art Visitor and Education Center. It has been a tremendous addition to our campus, providing our students and the public an even better experience when visiting our school. It is where all GDA guests are greeted; where we hold graduations, training and meetings; and it is the site of our new retail store.

The opening of the building allowed for the greatly anticipated return of two major events: the annual Ride for Guides fundraising event that attracted more than 400 riders and — in October — the ever-popular Open House. Contributing to the success of both events were the staff and volunteers who pitched in to ensure a good time was had by all. I couldn't be prouder or more humbled by the generosity of so many. It is their dedication that helps us in "making teams come true" for our students.

As we approach 2018, we will be launching a newly designed website and updating our student and educational materials. Also in the works are plans to renovate the administration building and student dormitory, with more improvements and enhancements to come.

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Mission Statement

Guide Dogs of America is dedicated to its mission to provide guide dogs and instruction in their use, free of charge, to blind and visually impaired men and women from the United States and Canada so that they may continue to pursue their goals with increased mobility and independence.

"I've never had eyesight, but I think my blindness has given me social awareness.

Growing up as a blind child taught me to not feel sorry for myself, I have learned the difference between compassion and pity. The difference between a thirst for justice and bitterness, and the need to hold myself accountable for my own life rather than letting the blame for my barriers rest on others and stop there."

— Elizabeth M. René

"My sense of humor has been sharpened since I lost my sight. The comments and questions I have heard have given me the opportunity to think of fun and inventive replies. Such as when I am asked if my other senses have gotten better, I let them know that of course, chocolate tastes so much better to me now! When asked if I am legally blind, I ask "who passed a law making it illegal?" Yes, things were lost with my sight but fun things have been gained."

— Terri Klein

"My blindness has taught me empathy. The realization that I need other people (or a dog) to help me get through the day has reminded me that there are those who need my help, too. It really put my issues into perspective."

— Andrew Hager

"I have more independence now. I am not afraid of going out by myself. I still create mixed-media art. I still go to open mic nights and sing. I also tutor students in reading. Really losing my site has not stopped me from doing anything, I just do it a different way. OK, fine, I can't drive a car!!! Soon that won't be an issue either."

— Theresa Marchetti

"Really losing my site has not stopped me from doing anything"

"In the early days of blindness, I was out of work and didn't know what I could do. I wanted to go back to work, but this meant going to school to learn a new occupation. Well if I go to school, amongst other things, how was I going to find my way around the campus? Soon my questions about getting around on my own were answered by a brochure about guide dogs. Within six months of graduating from college with my faithful guide dog, I found part-time work as a machinist. Fifteen years ago and three dogs later, I was able to open my own shop. I love this line of work, and the dogs I've had have played an important part in my success."

— Bernie Vinther

"Deeper faith, strength, resilience and tenacity. A specific creativity that applies itself to re-learning skills in a new way. Especially in light of the fact that woodworking is a passion. Learning patience with myself and others. And of course, the experience of caring for, loving and having a guide dog. My awesome and loyal guides have added a dimension to my life, outside the fact that they keep me safe and help me navigate. Life is just more complete with a guide dog."

— William Shilling

Thinking Outside The (Donation) Box

Donors get creative and find new ways to give to GDA

In addition to the suggestions listed on these pages and on the GDA website, there are many ways to give to GDA. With a little thought and creativity, simple ideas can make a big difference. We thought that sharing these recent examples may spark some other creative ideas or serve as reminders of the non-monetary ways you can help support our program and introduce others to our school.

Bountiful Blankets

When Emily Casman started thinking about what she could do for her Girl Scout Gold Award project, she thought of GDA. The high school student made 215 colorful blankets and 60 dog rope toys for the GDA Puppy Department. Every puppy that leaves GDA with his or her puppy raiser will go to its new home with one of Emily's beautiful blankets.

Welcome Gift for Students

Inspired by the students at a GDA graduation, Annie Dietel wanted to do something special for future students. She got the idea to make "hospitality bags." She took the initiative and wrote letters to the manufacturers of the products that she wanted to include. In addition to day-to-day items for the graduates, with GDA's approval, she also approached and secured items for the guide dogs. She made 60 bags — enough for a full year of graduates; each bag includes 10 products. In the process, Annie learned how to package and mark things to make it easier for a visually impaired individual to identify the item.

Hostess Chooses to Give to GDA

Kathleen Johnson, one of GDA's puppy raisers, found a "fund" way for her Bunko group to donate to GDA. Each month, the group takes up a collection for the charity of the hostess' choice. In addition to Johnson, two of her fellow "Bunkettes" have chosen GDA. So far, the group has sponsored three harnesses and several puppy "go home" kits. This same concept would work with any "game group."

For inspiration

Here are few other ideas and simple ways to support Guide Dogs of America:

- Donating proceeds from garage/yard sales
- Requesting, in lieu of birthday or anniversary gifts, that guests donate to GDA (have a donation jar at the party)
- Collecting "Pennies for Puppies" at school or work; visit GuideDogsofAmerica.org and click on **How to Help** for information about how to get started
- Donating a vehicle or boat

Making Your List, Checking It Twice

GDA has ideas for thinking outside the (gift) box

Skip the malls and shopping hassle with easy, everyday ideas for giving to your friends and loved ones, while giving to GDA. We also have ways for you to keep the holiday spirit of giving all year long, including online shopping options that give a percentage to GDA, matching employer gifts and monthly giving.

GDA's Holiday Fund-a-Need Campaign — Dec. 1-Dec. 31, 2017

Support GDA's Holiday Fund-a-Need Campaign and help fulfill the wishes of GDA's Puppy, Nursery, Veterinary, Kennel and Student Services Departments.

The campaign runs Dec. 1-Dec. 31. We encourage you to share this information with your family, friends and co-workers and to share the link www.biddingforgood.com/guidedogsofamerica via social media. (Note: link only active during campaign dates.)

A gift for you... Your donation is a tax deduction, and the end of 2017 is just around the corner.

Please note: This is NOT an auction; your donation will fund a GDA need.



Online Shopping

If you are shopping on Amazon, please go through smile.amazon.com. GDA will receive .5 percent of your total amount purchased all year (on most items). The first time you visit the site, you will be asked what charity you would like to support. Type in **Guide Dogs of America**, and a drop-down menu will appear. Click on the first option, which will be **International Guiding Eyes, Inc.** Every time you shop Amazon in the future, go through smile.amazon.com. The site will remember GDA as your charity of choice. If you are shopping from a different device, you will need to choose GDA the first time you use it. Please share this information with your family, friends and co-workers. Thank you!



Give to GDA as Your Gift to Family and Friends This Holiday Season.

Paw-ndering what to get the person who has everything? You give in their name. A great gift idea and a very special way to support GDA during the holidays is to make a contribution in the name of your family and/or

friends. Your contribution lets those important people on your list know how much you care about the work we do. It also lets them know they are remembered by you in a thoughtful way that makes them a part of giving the gift of independence and mobility to those who are visually impaired. A handwritten card with a special message will be sent to those you designate with your donation. For more information, call (818) 833-6429.

Matching Gifts

Many companies offer a matching-gift program to employees. These programs match, dollar-for-dollar,

charitable contributions made by an employee, doubling the donation made to Guide Dogs of America!

Ask your employer if it offers a matching-gift program.

Year-Round Giving One Month at a Time

Many of our supporters make monthly donations to GDA using our convenient, automatic donation program. At the beginning of each month, we automatically charge your credit card in the amount you specify. Call (818) 833-6429 with questions or to participate.



CFC Pledge Card

Please designate #11873 on your CFC pledge card. Your CFC contribution helps us breed, raise and train extraordinary guide dogs. These intelligent dogs are provided free of charge and offer trustworthy assistance and companionship to visually impaired men and women as they strive to live their lives to the fullest.

Tax-deductible, End-of-year Charitable Gift Giving

If you are planning to make a donation to GDA and would like to deduct the charitable contribution on this year's taxes (2017), you'll need to make your gifts by Dec. 31. For more information on end-of-year planning, go to guidedogsofamerica.org, click **How to Help**, then click on **Gift Planning**.



If You Would Like To Lend A Paw...

GDA could not continue to fulfill its mission without your generous support.

For more information about how you can become involved in our mission, please visit the **How to Help** section of the Guide Dogs of America website at guidedogsofamerica.org. You can also contact us via e-mail at: mail@guidedogsofamerica.org or by phone at (818) 362-5834.

Keeping the Holidays Happy and Safe for Your Dog



Before you deck the halls with boughs of holly or buy chocolate gold coins or the dreidel, remember your four-legged family member and take special care when having these decorations and treats in your home.

The holidays can present special dangers for your dog. Here are some of the ways you can keep the holidays enjoyable for both you and your dog:

- ID tags and collars — With parties, guests and the merry chaos that comes along with holiday festivities, doors and gates can be inadvertently left open and dogs may wander out in the confusion. Make sure your dog is wearing a collar with an ID tag to ensure a happy reunion.
- Keep a routine — Dogs do not understand all the holiday commotion so providing the security of a normal routine will help them feel calm. Take some time to ensure they have a quiet place to rest and retreat from all the excitement the holidays bring. Even though you are busy, make time for exercise and play with your dog — it's something you will both benefit from and enjoy.

- Holiday plants — Seasonal plants — particularly poinsettias, mistletoe, holly and amaryllis — can be toxic to dogs and should be kept out of reach.
- Decorations — Those extra cords used for lighting can be tempting targets for chewing by dogs. Items such as ornaments and candles can be choking hazards or cause intestinal blockages. Even the preservatives in Christmas tree water can be toxic so keep these and other items out of your dog's reach.
- Gift wrap — Avoid tying yarn or ribbon around your dog's neck. If you want to dress up your dog for the holidays, buy a festive, seasonal collar.
- Holiday treats — Rich holiday foods and desserts can make dogs extremely ill: chocolate, poultry bones and high concentrations of sugar can be especially dangerous. Splurge on healthy dog-designated treats if you must and remember that giving them attention is much more important than treats!
- Travel — If you're traveling for the holidays, bring along your dog's favorite blanket, toy and foods so he/she feels as comfortable as possible. Bring your veterinarian's phone number with you in case of an emergency.

With just a bit of planning and sensitivity to your dog's needs, you can keep your dog safe, secure and happy throughout the holidays.

8th-Annual Holiday Card Contest

This year's holiday memories, next year's GDA holiday card



Now is the time to start thinking about staging a holiday-themed photo of your dog to submit for our eighth-annual Holiday Card Contest. Say, "Puppy treats!"

Submission guidelines:

- All photos **MUST BE TAKEN IN HIGH RESOLUTION (300+ dpi)** and submitted via email as an attachment by Feb. 28, 2018 to partners@guidedogsofamerica.org. All photo entries become the property of GDA. Credit for the winning photo will be given.
- Winner will be notified on May 15, 2018, and the photo will be posted on our website
- Please make sure that the email includes your full name, dog's name and your phone number

Message From The President [continued from page 1 »](#)

I encourage you to visit our beautiful, 7.5-acre campus; meet our outstanding staff and volunteers; and, of course, check out the new merchandise in our store.

On behalf of GDA, I want to thank everyone for all their help and support this past year. I would also like to congratulate all of the graduates and their new canine partners.

When I am not in Sylmar at GDA, I have been traveling the country promoting the school and working with others to raise the funds necessary to provide guide dogs at no cost to blind and visually impaired recipients.

As for my family and me, we have relocated to Santa Clarita, Calif., from Boston. We are very happy here and we are enjoying sunny Southern California.

Wishing everyone a happy and safe holiday season and great opportunities in the New Year.

Two Longtime GDA Employees Hang Up Their Leashes

Steve Burkman and Louise Henderson retire

Two of GDA's most beloved employees have retired. Field Services and Licensed Instructor Steve Burkman and Puppy Department Manager Louise Henderson have been fixtures at the GDA campus for nearly three decades each. They will be missed greatly by all.



Burkman began his GDA career as a groundskeeper. The ever-enthusiastic Burkman just wanted to get his foot in the door. He apprenticed and became a licensed guide dog instructor. Several years ago, he was given the responsibility of field services, conducting in-home training and home visits to our graduates.

Hundreds of students benefited from Steve's encouraging manner and expert training.

"I have truly been blessed to have had such a wonderful working career.

With so many years of thoughts and memories of staff, all the volunteers, the memories of just meeting people on the streets, our graduates, the thousands of dogs I have had the opportunity to work with, I can't put into words what it has all meant to me. Thank you to all. I will carry you with me in my heart always," Burkman said.



Louise Henderson, Puppy Department manager, started her nearly 30-year career with GDA when she came to the school as a volunteer in the kennel. Henderson worked as a kennel tech for a year before moving into the Puppy Department. She took over within a couple of years and has helped to build

the department and the puppy raising program from one local group to include several satellite groups throughout California. Recently, she oversaw the introduction of the "Head Start" enrichment program for puppies at seven weeks of age. She also worked closely with GDA's 200-plus volunteer puppy raisers and the training department.

"I will miss the people, staff and puppy raisers, and it is going to be hard getting use to a new routine without coming to GDA but I do plan to stay involved by volunteering. I am looking forward to having the time to do home projects and spending more time with my grandkids," Henderson said.

Please join us in thanking and wishing well these two wonderful individuals for their many, many contributions to the school through the decades.

Congratulations Graduates

Class #398



Graduates (Puppy Raiser in parentheses):

Front row left to right: Chris Barrett and Summit (*The Ames Family*), Paula Castro and Delaney (*The Weeden Family*), Bill Mlynarski and Bruno (*The Wigginton Family*), Myrna Speirs and Tesla (*The Venegas Family*), Raquel Welch and Dozer (*MaryEllen and David Lefler*), Christy Steele and Blythe (*Carley and Peter Halatsis*), Cesar Palma and Whimsey (*Clare Knutson*), Jose Guzman and Berkeley (*The Hart Family*), Alana Leonhardy and Nela (*Alyssa Almeida*)

Instructors: (back row) left to right: Steve Burkman, Melinda Romero, Sean Chiles

Class #399



Graduates (Puppy Raiser in parentheses):

Front row left to right: BJ Campbell and Darwin (*Katie Alexander and Josh Gallner*), Michelle Plunkett and Jasper (*Ken and Jenny Goheen*), Susie Halverson and Mickie (*The Lauterbach Family*), Kathy Haddock-Gafford and Sage (*Diana and Ele Synder*), Laura Buckner and Matea (*Dave and Mary Brown/Al and Debbie Price*), Veronica Hernandez and Eloise (*The Rawding Family*), Veronica Elsea and Ricotta (*The Prince Family*), Gary Simmons and Mystic (*Sandy Unger*), Bryan King and Bill (*The Stevens Family*), Sybil Wolfe and Webster (*The Lawrence Family*)

Instructors: (back row) left to right: Alejandra Maldonado, Jamie Hunt, Linda Hawes

Fall Merchandise & Holiday Gift Ideas

Find holiday gift ideas online at Shop GDA!

Whether buying a gift or something for yourself, you'll find lots of great GDA logo items at Shop GDA! Go to guidedogsofamerica.org, click **How to Help**, then click on **Shop GDA!** Merchandise is also available for purchase by phone by calling (818) 833-6429 or at GDA's new retail store.

GDA Adjustable Dog Collar



NEW! This attractive "GDA blue" collar is printed with a continuous pattern alternating the words "Guide Dogs of America," with the GDA logo. The heavy-duty fabric collar is available in three sizes: Small (fits 10"-14") — price: \$12.00. Medium (fits 14"-20") — price: \$14.00. Large (fits 18"-28") — price: \$16.00. Price does not include tax or shipping and handling.

Fast and Furriest T-Shirt



There's nothing "ruff" about our soft, 100%-cotton T-shirt. Made in the USA, the unisex light-blue shirt features the GDA logo on front and a whimsical design on the back showing a guide dog driving his partner in a red sports car. Sizes: Medium-3XL (women order one size smaller) — price: \$20.00. Price does not include tax or shipping and handling.

In Memory

It is with sadness that we mark the passing of the following guide dogs:

Alvin — Class 362
Gareth — Class 362
Jackson — Class 344

Jasmine — Class 345
Wissel — Class 357

CORRECTION: In the last newsletter, it was incorrectly written that Cat Perry had passed away; Ms. Perry lost her beloved guide dog Gareth, whose passing is noted above.



GDA By The Numbers



23 litters of pups born last year

200 puppies-in-training in foster homes

46,515 pounds of food per year

3,940 loads of laundry washed per year

2,080 miles a trainer walks per year

4 pairs of shoes that each trainer goes through per year

1,925 vaccinations per year

45 full- and part-time employees

133 on-campus volunteers and tour guides

GDA Annual Open House Returns

‘Making Teams Come True’

The return of GDA’s annual Open House was a great success. This year’s theme was “Making Teams Come True”. Hundreds of people and plenty of puppies enjoyed the days’ festivities. The silent auction featured more than 200 bountiful baskets and dozens of prizes were raffled off. The puppies-in-training put the skills they’re learning into practice at the puppy trials and our guide dog trainers demonstrated the amazing skills our guide dogs are taught to safely lead a blind person. Attendees took tours of the school, visited the kissing booth for some puppy love and enjoyed a delicious barbecue lunch. Thanks to all who volunteered and made this a wonderful community event and thank you to all of those who attended. We look forward to seeing you all next year.



Partners in Trust

The Partners in Trust Society was established by GDA as a way to recognize and honor the generosity of those who have included the school in their planned giving.

By thoughtfully naming GDA in their wills, trusts and life insurance policies, the members of the Partners in Trust Society ensure that their support of GDA will continue for years to come. We are forever grateful to them for remembering GDA in their estate plans — in any amount — and we are honored to be a part of their legacy.

For additional information about how you can leave a future gift to GDA, go to guideddogsofamerica.org, click on **How to Help**, then click on **Gift Planning** — or call Rhonda Bissell at (818) 833-6432.

Please note: The names that appear on this list indicate those individuals who have included GDA in their estate plans during this past GDA fiscal year (July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017).

Anonymous (3)

Sandra M. Arendt

Dr. Susan B. Jackson

Tom & Chris Richey

We are saddened that these Partners in Trust are no longer with us and we honor their memory here for their gracious act of giving to GDA that will support the school long into the future:

Helen Barnes

Joanne Baumberger

Barbara Bennet

Keith G. & Helen B. Boillot

Janette Cantrell

Linda L. Edelman

Helen Furnelly

Christine Heckerman

Richard Hollow

Edgar M. Howard

Vina L. Johnson

Richard D. Lerner

Janet & Hermann Meisenbach

Florence Scribner

Virginia Lee Smith

Thomas & Antonia Yager

Theodore Zuck



Partners newsletter

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Want More GDA News? Check Us Out On Social Media

Follow us on our social media channels to keep up to date and in the know about GDA happenings including news, announcements, event information and lots and lots of cute puppy photos on our social media channels. Visit our website, guidedogsofamerica.org, scroll to the bottom of the page and click on one of these “bugs” to follow.



Or search and follow us on these platforms:

Facebook — facebook.com/GuideDogsofAmerica

Instagram — [guidedogsofamerica](https://www.instagram.com/guidedogsofamerica)



A GDA Wag Of The Tail

As the year comes to an end, Guide Dogs of America would like to take the opportunity to thank all of our contributors, donors and volunteers. Without their generous support, we would not be able to change the lives of those who are visually impaired with the gift of a guide dog.

New Employees And New Responsibilities

Please join us in welcoming five new employees to the GDA staff:

Stephanie Colman — Puppy Program Coordinator

Kimberly Geczi — Trainer

Zachary Gittlen — Outreach Coordinator

Debra Grossman — Grant Writer

Two of GDA's licensed instructors have assumed additional responsibilities, please join us in congratulating these two employees:

Linda Hawes — Field Services Trainer

Jamie Hunt — Apprentice Coordinator

