

Welcome Home — Life With A Guide Dog

Graduates share stories of going home after graduation

After calling GDA home for three weeks, our guide dog teams graduate and return to their real homes. While at school, they've learned how to work their dogs in a variety of situations and settings meant to simulate the day-to-day experiences they will encounter — but something is missing... family, friends and co-workers, to name a few.

Just as the guide dog is new to his or her partner, this four-legged family member is a new and welcome addition to the guide user's circle. Whether a first-time or fifth-time graduate, returning home with an always-by-your-side companion is a new experience for everyone.



Living the Dream

First-time graduate Jill Anderson graduated with Kirby in November 2017, and the pair has hit the ground running... and flying.

"Two months after graduation, I needed to make a sudden trip to Denver from our home in Southern California," Anderson said. "It was a daunting thought, but the trainers instilled in us the importance of setting ourselves up for success, so I made sure to plan and pack accordingly. Kirby rocked it! We rocked it."

At home, her husband and kids, who had provided their assistance for more than six years, are still getting used to Anderson's independence with Kirby at her side.

"My husband kept wanting to do things for me. He couldn't believe how independent I am. In the house, I no longer need an elbow or verbal directions to keep me from walking into things," Anderson said. "My kids watch with wonder. They can't believe how fast we walk. My daughter has said, 'Hey, wait for me.' My family cannot believe the speed and accuracy with which we walk."

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Message From The President



GDA is having a wonderful year. Since the opening of our new Macki & Phil Singer Visitor Education Center (VEC)

in December 2016, we now hold our graduation ceremonies indoors; campus tours start with an informative and inspiring video presentation; our new retail store is well-stocked with great GDA must-haves; and we host a number of educational seminars for students, staff, volunteers and the public. Just this year, we had more than 1,000 people tour our facility.

We are now working on refurbishing other areas of our campus. The next major projects include renovation of the administration building and student dormitory. Upgrading these two buildings is necessary to improve the functionality, efficiency, sustainability and aesthetic appeal of our school. We will be modernizing and reconfiguring the spaces; updating the lighting, mechanical systems, plumbing and accessibility; and changing the décor to be more consistent with the new VEC.

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Mission Statement

To empower the blind and visually impaired to live with increased independence, confidence and mobility by providing expertly matched guide dog partners.

For me, I love that now that I have Kirby, I no longer slouch down into my cane," Anderson said. "I walk upright and look straight ahead. Kirby figures it out and guides me safely. It's so liberating. When I say I'm living the dream, I mean it."



Buddies and Advocates

Also a first-time graduate, Mark Dresen said that the whole experience of having a guide dog has been "pretty unreal."

Dresen and Francie graduated in October 2016, and the pair have become not just "buddies," but busy advocates.

Dresen works for a major pharmaceutical company. In addition to introducing his new guide dog to his co-workers and educating them about what kind of

interaction they could have, Dresen had to teach Francie the lay of the land. With his office on a campus that is a sprawling 100-acre maze of buildings, there was much to learn.

"She had to learn which entrance to use, how to find my office and the various conference rooms and employee amenity areas, as well as navigate the many elevators and escalators," he said.

Dresen always has been an advocate for inclusion in the workplace, but since having Francie, he (and she) have become much more visible at his own company and beyond, with regular speaking engagements that range from a pack of Cub Scouts to veterinary students. The team also has appeared on the cover of a magazine about disabilities.

A grateful Dresen said, "Having Francie has taken me back to a level of independence that is close to what I had when I had my vision."



The Second Time Around

Beth Roff graduated with guide dog Emmett in October 2016. In addition to Beth's husband, the welcome home committee included two cats — a 19-year-old, six-pound feline with whom Emmett has learned to coexist and a 20-pound cat with whom he has become fast friends.

Even though Emmett is Roff's second guide dog, there still is a period of adjustment. "I knew what to expect, but it did take me a little bit of time to learn his personality and habits," she said.

Roff, who works full time in a law office, takes Emmett to work with her every day.

"It wasn't difficult for me or the people I work with to have a dog in the office because they were accustomed to seeing me with a guide dog. The learning curve wasn't as big for me this time around, and that probably made the transition easier on Emmett, too," Roff said. "He does great. GDA prepared us really well and did an excellent job matching us."



Putting His Life in His Guide Dog's Paws

Mystic is Gary Simmons' third guide dog. The team graduated on July 29, 2017, exactly 10 years after Simmons received his first dog.

Previously, Simmons's time between dogs was just one month, but because he wanted to be in the July class at GDA,

Simmons spent six months without a guide dog, during which Simmons had to use his cane.

"I missed having a guide dog. Yes, I could get out and do my errands with my cane, but if there are objects on the sidewalk or street that you don't know are there, you are running into things. Unfortunately, it's the only way you know it's there," Simmons said. "With Mystic, if there is something in our way, she has already seen it and figured out how to go around it.

"I know when I go out the door, Mystic is going with me, whether it's to church, school, work or on errands," Simmons said. "In my life, I've told everyone since day one when I got my first guide dog, when you learn to put your life in your dog's four paws, knowing that that dog is going to get you from point A to B and back again... no questions asked... there is no greater feeling. There is nothing out there that you can't conquer."



Period of Adjustment

Now settled at home with his fifth guide dog, Jeff Hedberg has found that the biggest thing you have to get used to when getting a new guide dog is learning what the dog is trying to tell you.

The team graduated in July 2016 and returned home where Hedberg's wife was there to greet them.

"There's always a period of adjustment when you go home. With every dog, you have to learn about their personality. Every dog is a little different in how they tell you things, but we learn

to communicate through the harness with one another," Hedberg said. "Kaleb was always eager to guide, but, at first, he was more reserved out of harness. Now, he surprises me by how playful and loving he is; how he relaxes and how he communicates with me is special." 🐾

Graduates-In-Training

Three weeks of class at GDA

Week One

Fundamentals

The students and instructors spend the first few days working primarily in a neighborhood close to the school, with instructors simulating walking with a guide dog in a training exercise called "Juno." Instructors hold the harness at the "dog end," while students take the harness handle. This exercise gives the trainers more information to determine the proper dog match. A few days later is "dog day," when the students meet their new guide for the first time. The rest of the week is spent learning the fundamentals of working with their guide dogs — first on campus, followed by nearby outings.



Week Two

Relationship and Communication

During this week, the instructors begin to highlight the relationship and communication between the students and their dogs, what the dog is telling the student and vice versa. This happens while the team is working, as well as during downtime and play or grooming sessions. How to manage traffic encounters, escalators and various indoor settings also is introduced.



Week Three

Out and About

Instructors begin preparing each client for what to expect when he or she transitions from GDA's in-residence environment to working at home and what his or her role is in the transition. Clients also are introduced to how to manage working on light-rail platforms and realistic expectations when traveling in busier or more distracting environments.



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Additionally, fundraising across the nation is in full swing. Some of the exciting events that are planned include golf tournaments, motorcycle rides, bowling tournaments, comedy nights, cigar events, dances and a casino night.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who commits themselves to these fundraising activities. It is because of your dedication that GDA is able to achieve its new mission: "To empower the blind and visually impaired to live with increased independence, confidence and mobility by providing expertly matched guide dog partners."

Miles For Money!



GDA was recently approved as a fundraising partner with Walk for a Dog by WoofTrax, Inc., a mobile device charity app that turns miles walked into money earned! Just download the free app to your phone (Android or iPhone), go to settings and select International Guiding Eyes, Inc., dba Guide Dogs of America, as your charity. Start the app each time you go for a walk. Donations are based on the number of "active walkers" using the app for GDA (an "active walker" is anyone who uses the app at least once a week for a minimum of a 1/4 of a mile). The more people who actively use the app for GDA, the more donations we can receive. So, spread the word, and let's all get walking!

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.

Donor Profiles

Barbara Meagher wanted to do more; she put her “trust” in GDA



Barbara Meagher learned about Guide Dogs of America after her beloved dog died, and her vet suggested she contact the school. This was in 1995, and Meagher has been a donor ever since.

Even though she had been making regular donations at the holidays and various times throughout the year, she wanted to do more. When her husband passed away last year, Meagher updated her trust and designated GDA to receive a significant donation, becoming a Partner in Trust.

“I thought GDA would be the best organization to give my money to. Being a Partner in Trust ensures that my estate will continue to give to such a worthy cause that helps those in need,” Meagher said. “I still send in money, as I have been doing because, I know that every bit helps.”

Meagher makes sure those around her understand why she chose GDA and why she encourages others to do the same.

“I want people to understand the important work that GDA does for those who are visually impaired or blind, so I tell them to put on a blindfold. Then I ask how they would like to go around the rest of their life not being able to see and having to ask for help to get around,” Meagher said. “I ask them to think about having a guide dog, a loving and loyal companion that could help them out and give them independence. It really gives them something to think about.”

Meagher has not visited the school in many years, but says that she feels connected to all that is going on through the newsletter and the regular “touch-base” calls she gets from the school, which she appreciates very much.

“GDA doesn’t forget that they have friends out there,” Meagher said. “I feel very close to the organization because of the personal contact.”

Guide Dogs of America is privileged to benefit from the generosity of caring individuals like Meagher. Gifts to our endowment will continue to support our mission to place extraordinary guide dogs with the visually impaired to enhance their lives. If you would like information about becoming a Partner in Trust, please contact Rhonda Bissell at (818) 833-6432.

2018 Quilt Raffle



This year’s quilt, “Doggie in the Window,” was made by The Orange County Quilters Guild. The group continues the tradition of providing a raffle quilt to benefit GDA. The patterns for each of the dogs were created and donated by Maryann Hertel of Made by Marney. The quilt measures 60” x 70”.

Tickets are \$2 each or six for \$10. Tickets are available for purchase at GDA, by mail, and by phone. Send your check to GDA postmarked by Dec. 1, 2018, or call GDA at (818) 833-6429. Tickets will be mailed to you using the return address on your check or the address provided at time of purchase. Drawing will be held at the GDA December puppy raiser holiday party. Winner does not need to be present.

Did You Know?

Fetching answers to frequently asked questions

Will a guide dog guide when walking on a leash?



Think of a guide dog’s harness as its work clothes. When the harness is on, it’s all business. The dog makes this distinction and knows that he/she must stay completely focused to keep its partner safe. When the harness comes off, the work day is

over. Even if the guide dog is being walked on a leash he/she will not guide; the guide dog responds to the working commands only when the harness is on.

Rest assured, it is not all work and no play for these dogs. Out of harness, guide dogs have plenty of time to play, pup-nap or simply enjoy the well-deserved attention and affection from their partner for another great day of guiding.

Congratulations Graduates

Class #402



Graduates (Puppy Raiser in parentheses):

Front Row from left to right: Dina Hakim and Willis (*Jessica Bethke*), Elizabeth Rene and Scotch (*Missy Stayton*), Erica Daniels and Wynn (*Janene and Tim Popoli*), Chris Mendenhall and Holly (*Jody Becker*), Tony Connett and Theo (*Marty and Terri Kasman*), Scott Kurtz and Ace (*Samantha and Barry Holden, Susan Raichel*), Laura Davila and Spence (*The Neumann Family*), Eva Arellano and Mimi (*Donna Dolan*)

Instructors: Back Row from left to right: Linda Hawes, Sean Chiles, Alejandra Maldonado

Congratulations Graduates

Class #403



Graduates (Puppy Raiser in parentheses):

Front Row from left to right: Ernesto Tabarez and Elphie (*Mike and Leslie Adams*), Leonardo Medina and Berlin (*Heather Roach*), Cassadi Hanley and Clinton (*Robyn and Will Reinhart*), Tina Woods and Captain (*John and Kate Ugoretz*), Mike Premro and Vince (*Val and Stan Goldstein*), Kristi Yang and Brody (*Lauren Amendola*)

Instructors: Back Row from left to right: Kim Geczi, Jamie Hunt

Save The Date

GDA Las Vegas Charity Event — Nov. 15-17

Mark your calendars for the annual Las Vegas Charity weekend Nov. 15-17, 2018. The weekend will kick off Thursday, Nov. 15, with the Hawgs for Dogs ride and the Sporting Clay event. Friday morning, golfers will tee off at Revere Golf Club. The weekend will conclude on Saturday evening with the 38th-annual William W. Winpisinger Charity Banquet at The Paris Las Vegas Hotel & Casino. This year, we will offer online registration for all events! Hardcopy invitations will also be available and mailed early this summer, and, details will be posted on the GDA website.

Online Bidding For Great Goods To Benefit GDA — June 1-11

Bidding on items in GDA's annual Silent Auction is now easier than ever with our new, bigger and better online auction. Log in to GDA's Bidding for Good auction (www.biddingforgood.com/guidedogsofamerica) from your computer, smartphone or tablet, and let the bidding begin. Choose from an array of items, including travel, sporting events, dining and many other fun activities and items. The site will be open for bids from June 1-11 only.

Correction: Our GDA Casino Night near the campus will be held on Saturday, August 4

New Employees

Cindy Beals — Controller

Celia Salazar — Part-time Kennel Tech

Greg Steinmetz — Manager of Admissions/
Student/Graduate Services

Karyn Paul — Part-time Nursery Tech

In Memory

With sadness, we note the passing of the following graduates:

Kenneth Brown — Class 303

It is also with sadness that we note the passing of the following guide dogs and breeders:

Kimball — Breeder

Mika — Breeder

Millie — Class 357

Whisper — Class 347

Othello — In-home

Partners newsletter

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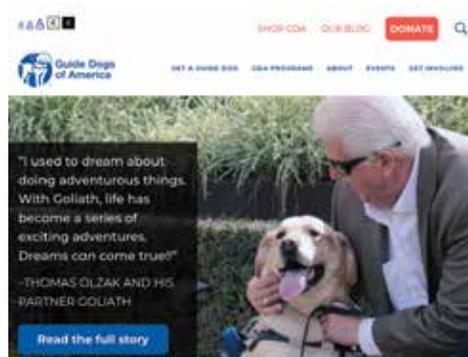
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If you would like to receive GDA's Partners newsletter in your email inbox rather than your home mailbox, let us know. It will save more than trees; it will save printing costs and postage so, even more of every dollar donated can go to our program. Simply go to www.guidedogsofamerica.org/e-mail-newsletter-signup and fill out the form with your email address, as well as your mailing address, so we can take you off the postage newsletter list.

Check Out Our New Website



Our new website has been refreshed just in time for spring! It has a new updated look, with user-friendly navigation and fresh content. Take a look at guidedogsofamerica.org.



8th-Annual Holiday Card Contest

GDA 2018 holiday photo card contest winner!

The winner of the annual holiday card contest is Ziva! The photo was taken by her Guide Dogs of America volunteer puppy raiser Karyn Paul. Ziva will be featured on the front of GDA's annual holiday card. We received so many great photos. Thank you to all who sent in submissions!

Holiday cards will be available toward the end of summer. Please check the website for updates.