Our guide dogs are living the life they were bred, born, raised, and trained to do... and with the exception of the 18 months or so our puppies spend with their puppy raisers...everything happens at GDA.

Last year 160 puppies were born in our nursery and lovingly cared for by Meri Forman, Breeding Department Manager, and her team – Registered Vet Tech Janice Tyler, and Jan Stevens, who works weekends in the nursery.

“Every puppy is a special delivery to us. We have worked for many years to develop our own guide dog line and we have several generations in the line,” explained Meri. “We bred the great, great grandparents of the dogs that are currently in the program.”

There are 30 female breeding dogs and a dozen stud dogs in the program. Females are not bred until they are at least two-years-old and will never have more than one litter a year or more than four litters in total. Ninety-percent of the dogs in the breeding program are Labrador Retrievers, the rest are Golden Retrievers. Poodle-mix puppies are not bred at GDA, but are donated to the school by specific breeders that have been thoroughly screened by the breeding department.

“The gestation period for dogs is two months and we can ultrasound at 28 days,” said Meri. “Sometimes we’ll see seven puppies in the ultrasound and then deliver 10, or a dog that may have delivered just one puppy in a previous litter, may deliver six the next. We’re always ready for a surprise.”

Occasionally, the surprise is not as welcome. If Meri or her team sees that a female is ready to give birth and is having problems our vet will then safely delivery the puppies via cesarean section.

“At GDA we are well aware of the many amazing accomplishments of our guide dog teams. Whether it’s returning to school, caring for their family, working, volunteering, or simply enjoying the increased freedom and mobility that comes with having a guide dog, our graduates are out in the community. We wanted our graduates to share a bit of their day-to-day life with you and so we asked them:

Is there an interesting place you and your guide dog work or go to volunteer?

Their very interesting responses appear throughout the newsletter.
WHAT’S IN A NAME – HOW OUR PUPPIES GET THEIR NAMES

When a litter is born at GDA it is assigned a letter. Puppy raisers are notified of which “litter letter” their puppy has been assigned before they pick up their puppy from GDA and are asked to give it a name beginning with that letter. We asked our more than 250 puppy raisers if there was a special meaning behind the name of the puppy they are currently raising or any of their previous puppies. We were overwhelmed by the number of responses we received. We could not reprint all of them here, but want to thank all of the puppy raisers for sharing their stories with us. Several of their responses appear on this page.

Harper’s personality was a bit like the main character in my favorite book, To Kill a Mockingbird. The main character’s name is Scout, but since she is an “H” litter, I went with the author…Harper Lee.
– Melani Farnum

When I was told I was getting a male black lab with the litter letter “F”, a light bulb went off! Since I have family and friends who are firefighters, I decided on Fahrenheit.
– Sheila Owen

I chose the name Leila because it means “dark as night” (appropriate for a black puppy!).
– Laura Brennan

When I was a child I had rescued a mutt and named her Cammie. Cammie took me all through my teenage years and helped me with my kids when they were babies. I loved her so much, so when we got called to name our first black lab female a “C” name we didn’t hesitate to name her Cami (different spelling) in honor of my childhood friend. – Sonja Epstein

My puppy Dash was named after a beautiful inspirational poem called “The Dash.” I had just read it when I spoke to Louise and found out I would be receiving a “D” litter pup. What else would his name be?
– Lynne Pennala

 Promise arrived a couple of days after Christmas last year, and she was the best Christmas gift I got, a reminder of God’s “promise” of salvation to us when Christ was born. My girl is going in for formal training next month, and she has “promise-d” me she will live up to her name.
– Peggy Kollen

Lefty, our three-month-old black lab, was named because he will be on the left side of his partner’s wheels.
– Ann and Steve Barklow

Edison’s name seemed to be a natural, as I thought if he did choose a career as a guide dog, his name meant that he would light the way for the person he would be guiding.
– Hillary Ripps

I have always loved the challenge of finding a good guide dog name for the litter letter … it can indeed be a challenge! Apollo was the pup with a special mission, Trigg – a trusted friend, Kaden – a friend and companion, and Emmett – a trustful and strong worker.
– Susan Renwick

Most recently my Eleah…her name means “blessings.” She is a breeder and recently had her last litter. Every one of her wee pups has indeed been blessings no matter what path they followed. GDA pups no matter what their name, no matter if they grow up to accept the challenge of a guide, are all special blessings because they all give their best!
– Pam English

I work at a television station and we let our viewers vote. We had a list of pretty much every “W” name there is! We ran a poll with the names of the five finalists and received 1,249 votes! That’s more than we received for the presidential poll! Her name is Winnie and she ‘won’ with 35% of the vote.
– Michael Maas

I really wanted something cute with a little something behind it. After searching for a few days I came across the name Nyah. It is from Swahili and means “purpose.”
– Arica Parga

I have been naming my puppies native America Indian names. Wanagi means “guiding spirit.”
– Mary Deets

When I came to the name Drea – meaning “courage” in Greek – I knew I had it. Not for the courage the dog represents, but for the courage it must take for a person to decide to commit to a guide dog, to trust the dog, to trust the team, and to learn a whole new way of “seeing” the world.
– Laurel Schuman

We named our “V” litter puppy Velo. It is French for bicycle and Velo will be his partner’s wheels.
– Ann and Steve Barklow

When I came to the name Trooper was our first. We got involved because our Girl Scout troop attended an International Guiding Eyes graduation. Within six months we got our first puppy and knew he’d be involved with the girls. They were all such “Troopers.”
– Patti Hughes

We were on an Alaskan cruise when we received word our new puppy’s name would begin with “D”, hence the name Dutch for Dutch Harbor, a port in Alaska.
– Anne Gunderson

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We named our second puppy Destiny because we liked it and it spoke to her future.
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– Peggy Kollen

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– Ann and Steve Barklow

Lefty, our three-month-old black lab, was named because he will be on the left side one day soon and we wanted it to be a softball term since he will be raised on the softball fields. We think it's an appropriate guide dog name.
– Judy Manzer

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– Anne Gunderson

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– Hillary Ripps

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Paula Abdul shares the puppy love with Guide Dog Schools

Paula Abdul, a judge on the hit reality TV singing competition “American Idol,” is singing the praises of a new national campaign that will help to raise money for GDA, along with a few other guide dog schools throughout the country. Abdul has teamed up with Dick Van Patten’s Natural Balance, Petco, and independent pet stores as spokesperson for a month-long promotion in which Natural Balance will donate 50 cents from every marked bag sold during the month of May. Funds raised through this program will help to raise money that will support guide dog programs throughout the country. Two years ago the program raised $125,000 with only the state of California’s participation in the promotion. Now it’s national! Please help us to make this a very successful fundraiser for our school and purchase your Natural Balance dog food during the month of May.

Microchip – A microchip can be the one thing that will reunite you with your dog if you become separated – all of GDA’s dogs are microchipped. Shelters scan pets to detect the presence of a microchip. The information from the microchip is sent to a national database and provides contact information for the registered owner.

Door Decal – Display a decal on your door or in a window to alert emergency personnel that there are pets inside. Include the number and the types of animals.

I.D. – Keep your pet properly fitted with a collar and current I.D. and rabies tag at all times. Local phone lines often are out of service during a disaster, so consider adding a tag with an out-of-area phone number. Tag all carriers, too. In case you and your pet are separated during a disaster, make sure you have proof of ownership, such as a health certificate and photos of your pet.

Health Records – Keep vaccinations up-to-date and keep a copy of their health certificate on hand in case you have to board your pet or leave the state.

Home Away from Home – List friends and relatives who could care for your pet for an extended period of time if you lose your home. Identify nearby hotels that accept pets.

We cannot be reminded often enough how important it is to have a disaster plan in place. Your dog depends on you for his safety and well-being. Being prepared will help to reduce anxiety and help you to better respond in case of emergency.

“Benny and I do GDA speaking on guide dogging and pro-active living. Every October, for the past five years, we have been invited back to speak at Disability Day at our local elementary school. The 6th graders love Ben and seeing my adaptive technologies.”

Bill Schley
The good times rocked and rolled at Bally’s Las Vegas Hotel when GDA celebrated its 60th anniversary during a weekend of fun and fundraising.

The three-day event got off to a roaring start on Thursday with the 8th Annual Nevada Hawgs for Dogs ride. More than 50 riders enjoyed the 70 degree weather as they travelled from the glitz of the strip to Bonnie Springs, Nevada, a replica of an 1880’s mining town, where they stopped for lunch, enjoyed an old time western show, and were awarded their raffle and door prizes before heading back to town.

On Friday morning 280 golfers got into the swing of things showing off their “greatest hits” at Angel’s Park in Las Vegas.

Bringing down the house on Saturday night was the 28th Annual William W. Winpisinger Charity Banquet. This year’s theme was “60 Years of Rock n’ Roll.” There were plenty of Elvis impersonators in attendance, but the guests’ enthusiastic support of GDA was genuine. With more than 1,000 fans in attendance, the event broke fundraising records again this year.

GDA’s Annual Fundraising weekend is one of the most successful ways in which GDA raises money in support of its mission to provide guide dogs at no cost to those without sight. Throughout the weekend, puppy raisers and puppies-in-training were there to meet all those who had gathered and thank them for their support. Three outstanding supporters of GDA were recognized at the banquet and presented with the prestigious Guide Dogs of America “Gift of Sight” award. Honored at this year’s banquet were Warren Mart, Joyce A. Day, and The Boeing Company.

Warren Mart
A member of the IAM for more than 40 years, Warren Mart has been a long-time supporter of GDA and has been involved in many fundraising events for the school, including serving on the banquet committee for this year’s charity banquet. Warren joined the IAM in 1966 and has been actively involved ever since. Warren held several local and district positions before being elected in 1997 as a General Vice President and assigned to direct IAM programs and activities in the union’s Eastern Territory. He has served as IAM General Secretary-Treasurer since 2003.

Joyce A. Day
Honored as the first woman to receive the “Gift of Sight” award, Joyce Day has been a loyal and active member of the IAM for more than 41 years. She also has served as a volunteer to the Guide Dogs of America Charity Golf Tournament all 24 years since its inception. A union member since the age of 18, Joyce has worked for eight Directing Business Representatives during her tenure. After a long and rewarding career, Joyce retired in February of this year to spend more time with family and friends.

The Boeing Company
(Represented by Rick Stephens)
The Boeing Company and its employees are actively involved in making positive contributions within the communities where the company has a presence. Each year, Boeing members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers generously support Guide Dogs of America through employee payroll deductions and fundraising events.
For the first 2 – 2 ½ weeks, the puppies’ eyes and ears are closed and the mothers do most of the work, and then soon after the puppies get moving. “The puppies start doing their clumsy walk just before they are three weeks old, and at three weeks they begin eating puppy food…three times a day,” said Meri. “The puppies are fully weaned from their mothers when they are 6 – 7 weeks.”

So with all those puppy paws running around, what is a typical day in the nursery? “Clean up, laundry, feed, clean up, laundry, laundry,” said Meri. “We feed the puppies three times a day and we do 15 – 20 loads of laundry a day. Each morning starts with two hours of cleaning and at 3 p.m. we begin cleaning up again.”

Between the feedings and the cleanings, everything is done to ensure the health of our puppies and their mothers. “Entry into the nursery is extremely limited. Anyone entering the nursery is outfitted with scrubs to ensure no outside germs or illnesses are brought into the facility that could compromise the health of our puppies or our breeding stock,” said Meri. “We also make sure all the puppies are wormed and receive their vaccinations before going home with their puppy raisers.”

But before the puppies can leave, the nursery department conducts health evaluations and gives medical clearance. Then the Puppy Department evaluates each puppy with a series of tests. “The puppy department tests the puppies at seven weeks. They are tested for a willingness to please with a retrieval test. To test if a puppy is dominant or shy we put him on his back. If he ‘fights back’ the puppy might have a tendency toward independence,” explained Meri. “Shaking coins in a can tests if a puppy is sensitive to or scared of sounds. To see how a puppy reacts to surprise, we’ll pop open an umbrella.”

Meri and her team have been incredibly busy the past several months. In January there were six litters in the nursery that had been born in November and December! By the end of January all six litters had gone home with their puppy raisers, leaving the nursery empty. But in February – just in time for Valentine’s Day – another litter was born…filling the nursery full of puppy love, once again! 🐾
OWN YOUR OWN “HAWG” AND SUPPORT OUR DOGS – ANNUAL BIKE RAFFLE

Customized 2009 Harley-Davidson FLHX Street Glide

There will be no mistaking where your loyalty lies when you ride up on this one-of-a-kind customized GDA Harley-Davidson FLHX Street Glide. The vibrant GDA blue and black bike was custom painted by Donnie Smith and features a stunning collage of three breeds – Labrador Retriever, Golden Retriever, and German Shepherd on the ferring. On the gas tank is an eye-catching rendering of the GDA logo stylized with added wings and our trademark “Hawgs for Dogs.”

Tickets are $5 each or five tickets for $20. Complete and return the order form on this page (postmarked by Nov. 1, 2009) to purchase tickets. Tickets can also be purchased at GDA or from our secure web site (www.guidedogsofamerica.org) through Nov. 15, 2009. The winning ticket will be drawn on Nov. 21, 2009 at the Guide Dogs of America Annual Banquet in Las Vegas. (Winner need not be present to claim prize.)

“A DAY WITH THE TRAINERS”
The Experience of a Lifetime

This extremely popular annual raffle prize will take you behind the scenes of GDA where you will observe the trainers working with our incredible dogs and teaching them to become partners with our visually impaired students. Two lucky people will spend “A Day with the Trainers” accompanying them as they transport and work our guide dogs-to-be on training routes, observing daily training exercises, and, after being blindfolded by a trainer, taking harness in hand and being led on a short route with a dog and the trainer to experience how it feels to be led by a guide. Winners must be at least 18 years of age and able to walk 4-5 miles in one day.

Use the order form included in the newsletter or purchase tickets at GDA before or on June 13, 2009 (Open House). Tickets are $5 each or five tickets for $20. Winner will be notified on June 17, 2009. Training date to be announced after the drawing.

GIVE THAT “HAWG” A HUG

Nash B. Gillis of Gray, Georgia hugs his wife, Shannon, and son, Shayd, in front of his new, brilliant red Donnie Smith-customized Harley-Davidson FLHX Street Glide that he won in the annual GDA custom bike raffle. The winning raffle ticket was drawn at the 28th Annual William W. Winpisinger Charity Banquet in Las Vegas on Saturday November 22, 2008.

“Rawhide really enjoys volunteering at local elementary schools demonstrating his good behavior and guiding skills to all of the children. He is most especially proud when the puppies-in-training that are with us try to be just like him. The children love it and get so much out of learning about guide dogs and blind people.” Paul Jordan

RAFFLE TICKETS Order Form

Questions? Call (818) 833-6429.

Mail this entire form with your payment. Please note the deadline dates for the raffle ticket purchases to ensure your eligibility.

A DAY WITH THE TRAINERS RAFFLE

To be eligible entry must be postmarked by June 6, 2009.

Ticket Price: 1 ticket for $5.00 or 5 for $20.00

CUSTOMIZED HARLEY-DAVIDSON FLHX STREET GLIDE

To be eligible entry must be postmarked by November 1, 2009.

Ticket Price: 1 ticket for $5.00 or 5 for $20.00

TOTAL ENCLOSED

Name

Address

City  State  ZIP

Phone

Credit Card (check one) □ VISA  □ MasterCard  □ Discover

Expiration Date: ______/______

Card Number:

Signature: (required for credit card purchase)

Check (make your check payable to Guide Dogs of America)

Mail to: Guide Dogs of America  ATTN: Raffle Tickets Order Form

13445 Glenoaks Blvd., Sylmar, CA 91342  Or use the enclosed envelope.
Popular L.A.-based radio deejays “Mark & Brian” met their puppy-in-training counterparts during a recent radio interview at the KLOS-FM (95.5 FM) studio. Mark is shown with his namesake black lab and Brian with the yellow lab. Both puppies are being raised by GDA puppy raisers, who will make on-air visits to the deejay duo and report their puppies’ progress and announce upcoming GDA events. Stay tuned!

**“SPORTS DAY AT GDA” – OPEN HOUSE**

Team up with GDA at our annual Open House on Saturday, June 13, 2009 when it will be “Sports Day at GDA.” Dress in your favorite sports attire – whether it’s a pro sports team jersey, referee (things get a little “ruff” during the puppy trials), Little League uniform, or as a cheerleader – we’re going to have a ball!

Admission to the Open House is free, and there is food available to purchase. Gates open at 11 a.m. and close at 4 p.m. Events begin at 11 a.m. and end at around 3 p.m. We do ask that you leave your personal pets at home.

**CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES!**

Class #360

GRADUATES from LEFT to RIGHT (Puppy Raiser in parenthesis): Socorro Arroyo-Merchain & Nincha (The Chavez Family), Stacey Dunton & Houston (Kathy Tallant & Art Richardson), Tina Glen & Noelani (Heather Hall), Adam Lawrence & Escort (Melissa & Joe Hyams), Brittney Mejic & Harvard (Bobbiejo Dean), Christian Padilla & Salem (The O’Gorman Family), Eve Pimentel & Memphis (The Pitt Family), Sharlene Wills & Maisy (Rachel Conway), Deryal Wilkerson & A.J. (Kristie Bret-Harte)

INSTRUCTORS standing L to R: Annmarie Esposito, Dave Ponce, Patty Elizondo

**Partners in Trust**

Just as blind men and women partner with GDA’s remarkable dogs for additional independence and mobility, generous friends and supporters partner with GDA to help us carry out and maintain our mission. Become a member of the Partners in Trust Society by naming GDA in your will or trust and receive a beautiful, crystal biscuit jar. Please contact Rhonda Bissell at (818) 833-6432 for more information.

**Have You Visited Our Financial and Gift Planning Web Site?**

2. Click on the “Gift Planning” link under “How You Can Help.”
3. Click on “Partners In Trust.”

**IMPORTANT REMINDER: RE-REGISTER YOUR ALBERTSONS PREFERRED SAVINGS CARD**

If you have previously registered your Albertsons Preferred Savings Card indicating that you would like Guide Dogs of America to be your charity of choice, you will need to re-register your card to continue to support the school. Visit our website (www.guidedogsofamerica.org) and click on the “Albertsons Community Partners” link located on the left side of the home page. You also can register at www.alberstonscp.com or call Albertsons customer service at: (800) 696-6419.
GET REVVED UP AND READY TO RIDE

The annual “Ride for Guides” continues to grow in popularity – from 135 riders in our first year to more than 600 riders last year. Sunday, May 17th is the date for this year’s ride, which will take you on a scenic 100-mile route that begins and ends at GDA.

Riders registering before May 1, 2009 will receive a discount and a bonus. Early registration is $25 and includes a free ticket for the raffle of the bike shown in this issue. Registration after May 1 is $30.

For registration forms, information, sponsorship opportunities, or if you’d like to donate new items for our prize drawings, please call Lorri Bernson at (818) 833-6431. Registration forms also are available at our web site: www.guidedogsofamerica.org by clicking on the “Events Calendar.”

SAVE THE DATE! – 4TH ANNUAL “PARTNERS” AWARDS DINNER

Saturday, October 3, 2009 is the date of this year’s “Partners” Awards Dinner. The dinner will be at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, CA. Sponsorship opportunities are available. For information, contact Debbie Sands at (818) 833-6433.

NEW EMPLOYEES & NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Please join us in welcoming a new employee and congratulating two current employees.

Joanna Wilkenson – Apprentice
Linda Hawes – Apprentice Coordinator. Linda has been with GDA for the past 24 years. In her new position she will help design the new “Basic Apprenticeship Course” and lead apprentices through their three-year program.
Tiffany Andrews – Apprentice. Previously a kennel tech, Tiffany has been with GDA for a little more than a year.

IN MEMORY

It is with sadness that we note the loss of a member of our GDA family:
Ralph Botello — Class 336

With sadness we also note the passing of the following guide dogs for their dedication to ensuring the safety and independence of their partners:
Cherry — Class #334
Gina — Class #322
Rex — Class #343.5
Shyla — In-home training

GIVE TO GDA WITH PETGIVE.COM

Before you shop online, register with PetGive.com and you will be giving to GDA. To get started, visit: www.PetGive.com. Once you’ve registered, you will be asked to “select your pet charity.” Scroll down and click on “Guide Dogs of America”...that’s it...you’re ready to shop at hundreds of participating retailers (Nordstrom, Barnes and Noble, eBay, etc.). GDA will receive a percentage (varies by retailer) of the total purchase amount. So every time you shop online, go first to PetGive.com and shop the online retailer from that starting point.

Here’s an example of how GDA can receive money this way:

If 500 people make three purchases of $75.00 each month, based on the average percentage of purchase received, that would bring in about $3,374.00 for the month or approximately $40,488.00 for the year. Happy shopping, and don’t forget to always go first to www.PetGive.com!

“The places I enjoy volunteering with Zinnie are the home for the elderly and the elementary schools. For the children, it teaches them to be understanding about people who are different and why they are that way. They also learn how they can help one another. As for the elderly, it makes their day.” DEE DEE MANN