



2019 volume 34 number 1

The Bond Of Brothers

How retinitis pigmentosa and Guide Dogs of America have changed the lives of the Steinmetz brothers



The Steinmetz brothers, from left, David, Jeff, Greg, Mike.

It could have happened to any of the four Steinmetz brothers; but it happened to two of them. "It" is retinitis pigmentosa (RP), an inheritable eye disease that typically presents itself in the teenage years. RP is a group of rare, genetic disorders that involve a breakdown and loss of cells in the retina, which is the light sensitive tissue that lines the back of the eye. Those with RP typically experience a gradual loss of peripheral vision and have difficulty seeing at night.

Even though only two of the brothers have RP, the disease led all four of them to GDA and created a deep bond between the brothers, beyond the natural bond of siblings. Brothers David and Greg are guide dog users and graduates of GDA. Mike and Jeff have both found rewarding volunteer opportunities at the school.

David Steinmetz was the first brother to be diagnosed with RP, but the second to get his guide dog from GDA. David got his first guide dog in 2002 from another school. When that dog retired, he came to GDA where he graduated with Heidi in 2012. She was retired last year and this past October he graduated with Stetson.

"I know it is easy to say that guide dogs provide greater independence, and that is true," said David, who maintains a busy work and travel schedule. "The difference between GDA and the other school that I attended is that they focus on the 'team' philosophy, meaning that success is up to the handler and the guide dog. GDA staff work with the students in a way that helps them better understand how the dog is trained, how the dog should perform in various settings and situations and how the handler should listen to what the dog is telling them. They produce confident guide dogs that help to eliminate many obstacles that life throws at you."

President's Message



Russell Gittlen, President, Guide Dogs of America

Happy New Year to all! It is a privilege to be starting my third year as President of Guide Dogs of America. I am honored to have a position that allows me to

help others by providing remarkable dogs to amazing people.

I am very excited to announce that we have finished the renovations of our administration building and student dormitory. The 40-year old buildings have been updated and upgraded with new furnishings, electrical, lighting, mechanical, plumbing, and access systems. We left the same footprint but by reengineering the inside of the buildings we were able to add four dorm rooms, two offices, and a new conference room for classes. We also outfitted the buildings with the latest assistive-technology to ensure an exceptional student experience.

Heading into the new year, we will continue to advance our breeding program, enhance our canine development programs, and expose our guide dogs in training to an ever-growing variety of environments in order to best prepare them for the important work ahead. All of these exciting steps forward are crucial to ensure the success of our students and our school's ability to continue serving the blind and visually impaired community long into the future.

I welcome the new adventures this year brings and encourage you to join and support us on this journey.

Younger brother Greg was diagnosed with RP at 16 and had significant vision loss by age 21. The vision changes were gradual, and he had time to adjust at each level of change. The biggest change was losing his independence when he could no longer drive. While Greg admits he could have benefitted from a guide dog sooner, it was when David received his first dog that Greg got inspired to get his own.

“I saw how much a guide dog helped David and improved his quality of life. It made me want those same things. I wish I had done it sooner because of the positive changes it made in me,” said Greg, who graduated with his first GDA guide dog Proxy in 2004.

“I wasn’t comfortable using a cane and felt there was a stigma,” explained Greg. “Proxy changed all of that. I became more confident and independent. She made me feel I could do things on my own.

“Proxy had been sponsored by the Lion’s Club. It was only after I graduated that I learned what Lion’s does. I wanted to pay forward what was given to me, and through Lion’s I started fundraising and working on behalf of GDA.”

That volunteer work turned into a job. In 2017, Greg was named GDA’s Manager of Admissions & Graduate Services. He shares his office with Wiki, his third guide dog.

“Every day is a different experience. I love being able to call people and tell them that they will be getting a guide dog,” said Greg. “This is my dream job. Every day, I am helping others who may have been in the same place that I was in 15 years ago. I love talking to prospective students and hearing their success stories at graduations.”

Brothers Jeff and Mike both volunteer for GDA as their way of giving back to the school that has given their brothers so much. They are filled with admiration for David and Greg and appreciation for the school, which provides its guide dogs at no cost.

Mike and his wife Margo have raised two puppies and she volunteers with the “Head Start” program in the nursery.

“This is our little way of giving back to the school that has given our brothers such an amazing gift,” said Mike. “I’ve seen the independence and confidence it has given them. I think both of my brothers are incredibly persistent.

“David, in spite of his vision loss has managed to be quite successful in a lot of different areas. He puts himself out there every day as a positive role model for the blind community.

“And Greg, in light of the extra time and extra steps it takes to navigate his world, continues to flourish. I cannot think of a better person to have in his role at GDA. He has walked in the shoes of the prospective students, in-for-training students, and graduates and that is such an asset,” said Mike.

Jeff also wanted to give back to the school and started volunteering in the kennel about three years ago in his free time.

“GDA has helped both of my brothers so much that I want to do whatever I can to help the school continue to provide their service to the blind and visually-impaired community,” said Jeff. “I will go in on the weekends and get things cleaned up from the night before and set up for the day ahead. I do what I can to help and it’s very rewarding.”

Like Mike, Jeff is filled with admiration for all that his brothers have accomplished.

“What both of my brothers have overcome is remarkable. They haven’t let their visual impairments hold them back,” said Jeff. “David has an important position with his company and has been nominated for employee of the year. He has done a tremendous amount of work to give back and raise awareness for the blind community.

“The difference having a guide dog has made in Greg’s life is extraordinary. I have seen a huge transformation and I am so proud of his accomplishments. From being president of his Lion’s Club to participating in volunteer work to his current position at GDA. He puts himself out there and is very independent. It’s wonderful to see and I am so happy for him,” said Jeff. 🐾

Puppy Corner

Training Tips: Teaching a Reliable Recall

Teaching your dog to come when called (aka “recall”) is one of the most important behaviors you can teach your dog. In addition to this command being a good way to check in with your dog when he is in your yard, playing with another dog, or away from you in your house, it can also be a lifesaving skill. If your dog runs away from you and heads toward a potentially dangerous situation, such as running into the street, a reliable recall will make your dog stop in his tracks and run back to you.

As with any obedience skill, recall doesn’t just happen. You have to teach your pup this critical skill and put in some training time to make it stick. When training your dog to come to you, remember to always reward him for every successful recall. Be patient and work one step at a time. Refer to these helpful tips to make teaching recall fun and successful for you and your dog.

Choose Your Dog’s Reward

Find out what motivates your dog and use that as your dog’s reward. Most dogs are motivated by at least one or several of the following (you can use all of them or one of them):

- Food - This should be very high value - something your dog does not usually get. As your dog learns the command, you will be using more life rewards but initially, it is important that we use something that we know the puppy will respond too.
- Toys or Play - Try using your dog’s favorite toy for this and only bring it out when practicing recalls.
- Attention - Make sure to be exuberant with your pets and pats and give your dog lots of verbal praise!

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How to Teach the Recall

- Begin practicing in low-distraction environments like inside your house or a fenced yard. Start with short distances from your dog. Remember your dog does not know what the word means until you teach him.
- Until your dog is reliably coming to you when you call him, use your recall command when you know your dog will succeed (i.e. before feeding or walking). You will not be using the command for its intended purpose until your dog knows what the word means.
- Call your dog in an excited, upbeat tone. When your dog gets to you, hold onto his collar while you give him the reward. It is important that the dog makes contact with you. Practicing this “collar grab” can make it easier to catch him if he gets loose.
- As your dog learns the recall, begin working in more distracting environments. This will also help teach your dog to come to you in any situation. You can use a long line for safety, especially in unfenced areas.

Important Tips:

- Always make the recall positive; never punish your dog for coming to you. Even if you are upset or frustrated when you call him, make sure you still reward your dog for coming to you.
- Bending down, crouching down and calling your dog in a higher-pitched voice can make you more exciting to your dog. Try incorporating these into your recalls.
- If your dog does not come to you right away, increase your excitability and continue to encourage him until he does.
- At first, do not use the cue word “Come” unless you are sure your dog is about to respond or is on his way to you so that the word is associated with the coming behavior and not with ignoring you and doing something else.
- A trick if your dog isn’t coming to you is to get your dog’s attention and then start running in the opposite direction. This can elicit a chase reflex and get your dog to run to you. Then praise him for coming to you.
- Always be realistic about the distance over which you are expecting your dog to come to you and be aware of how distracting the environment is.

Merchandise

Shop GDA!

Check out new and popular merchandise from Shop GDA! Go to [guidedogsofamerica.org](https://www.guidedogsofamerica.org), then click on **Shop GDA!** Merchandise is also available for purchase by calling (818) 833-6429 or at GDA’s new retail store. Several of our newest items are featured here.

Comfy Crew Socks



These oh-so soft socks are made from a cotton-based fabric for cool comfort. Fabric pattern features blue GDA logos and black paw prints. Unisex adult; one size fits all. Made in the U.S.A. Price: \$14 (does not include tax or shipping and handling).

2019 GDA Lapel Pin



This year’s pin features a man being guided by a yellow Labrador Retriever with the words “Guide Dogs of America” and the year “2019” in the outside circle. Made in the U.S.A., the gold-toned metal pin is 3/4” round. Price: \$8 (does not included tax or shipping and handling).

Precious Plush Puppies



Snuggle up with a cuddly puppy, or three. Plush Labrador Retriever puppies, available in yellow and black, and Golden Retriever puppy, are sporting the “official” Guide Dogs of America puppy-in-training jacket. Made in the U.S.A and measuring 9 x 9 x 3

inches, these plush puppies are machine washable. Approved for ages 24 months & up. Price: \$20 (does not included tax or shipping and handling).

GDA Las Vegas Charity Weekend

“Bone” Voyage! Cruise-Themed Charity Banquet and Fundraising Events Sailed into the Record Books

Guide Dogs of America Annual Charity Weekend broke records for all its events this year.

The weekend of fun and fundraisers included the 38th annual William W. Winpisinger Charity Banquet, which was attended by more than 1,100 guests, a golf tournament that saw 256 players take to the links, the Hawgs for Dogs Motorcycle Ride, which took 40 riders on a scenic drive through the desert, and the increasingly popular sporting clay event that attracted a record 88 participants.

Introduced this year was a special appreciation award, “Leading by Example.” The inaugural recipient was Bob Martinez, who was recognized for his generous, enthusiastic, and tireless support of GDA.

GDA’s highest honor, the “Gift of Sight Award,” was awarded to four deserving recipients, who were recognized for their support of and dedication to the school.

New this year was a raffle for two vacation packages. Mario Henderson from Lockheed Martin won first prize, a Princess Cruises Premium Vacation Package and two round-trip business class tickets from United Airlines. IAM&AW Union member Brianna Gregory won second prize, two complimentary, one-day park hopper passes from Walt Disney World and four one-way flight e-passes from Southwest Airlines.

Throughout the weekend, graduates, puppy raisers, and puppies-in-training greeted all those who attended and thanked them for their participation and ongoing support.

GDA is grateful to all the sponsors, attendees, and volunteers for their generosity of spirit that have made this event a huge success for nearly four decades.



Gift of Sight Honorees



IAM General Secretary-Treasurer Dora Cervantes

Dora Cervantes initiated into IAM Local 2198 in Houston, Texas in 1989 as a Reservations Agent for Southwest Airlines. Since then, Cervantes has served in a variety of roles with increasing local and national responsibility and visibility.

Notably, she was the first woman to direct the IAM’s finances as General Secretary-Treasurer and the first Hispanic woman to serve as the first General Vice President of the IAM Executive Council.

Cervantes currently serves as a National Board Member on the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), is an active member of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), a member of United Against Human Trafficking, and serves as a Trustee for both the National IAM Benefit Trust Fund and the IAM National 401(k) Plan.

“For me, the reality is that raising money for Guide Dogs of America is a labor of love. For those of you who know me, you know my love for animals, especially dogs.”

GDA Graduate Teresa Blevins and her husband IAM Aerospace Coordinator Tony Blevins

This busy couple, along with Teresa’s guide dog Asia, has tirelessly traveled the United States as IAM ambassadors to GDA for several years.

At every event, the couple promotes the work GDA does to help the blind and visually impaired community. Their passion as volunteers and advocates for Guide Dogs of America is apparent to everyone they meet. Their message is not a rehearsed or scripted speech, it is from the heart and personal experience. As a graduate of GDA, Teresa knows first-hand the care that is taken to perfectly match guide dogs with their recipients. For Teresa, having a guide dog has made a tremendous difference in her life, as well as Tony’s.



“It takes a team, and you all are part of that team. It’s because of you, your generosity and your dedication to giving to Guide Dogs of America that I have mobility and independence. I don’t have to depend on someone else to lead and guide me because Asia does that for me. She keeps me safe wherever I am.”



National Group Protection, Inc.,

National Group Protection (NGP) has worked with the Machinists Union for more than 40 years to offer its members supplemental insurance plans. NGP is headquartered in Charlottesville, Virginia, and is proud to be an IAM&AW union shop.

NGP works with members across the country, in various local lodges, districts, territories, and departments, to provide customized benefit solutions.

The company and its relationship with GDA started with Joe and Sandy Palumbo and now continues with the leadership of Lou and Paul Raymond, who accepted the award. The NGP team also includes Patrick Elias, Jon Elias, and Robbie Whitestone.

“We are in this world together and we have an obligation to each other. NGP is so proud to support this wonderful organization.”

Donor Spotlight

From Puppy Raisers to Partners in Trust
Couple's commitment to GDA will last a lifetime and beyond



Kristin and George Pitt have seen first-hand what the gift of a guide dog can mean to a visually impaired or blind person. George Pitt's sister went blind from diabetes-related complications and the couple wanted to do their part for others who could benefit from having a guide dog by their side.

The Pitt's commitment to Guide Dogs of America started with puppy raising; they raised seven puppies. During their puppy raising years, Kristin also became an area co-leader for a puppy raiser group. Wanting to do more, they donated general funds, matching gifts, and stock. They sponsored guide dogs and sent "wish list" items at the holidays. Recently, the Pitts made a commitment that will last beyond their lifetimes by becoming Partners in Trust, designating GDA in their will.

"Being Partners in Trust is very important to George and me," said Kristen Pitt. "We have been so personally involved in GDA over the years, so when it came time to redo our wills it made sense that we would designate the school in our will. GDA puts a very high percentage of every dollar donated back into the program. Knowing our funds would be used wisely and that we are making a significant contribution to helping people like George's sister is very gratifying.

"GDA is an amazing organization with a true focus on helping individuals, and they put a lot of effort into the correct pairing of a working dog with a visually-impaired individual," added Pitt. "Having attended graduations and interacted with the recipients, we have witnessed the truly life-changing experience that comes with having a guide dog."

Guide Dogs of America is privileged to benefit from the generosity of caring individuals like the Pitts. 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.

Partners in Trust



Make your gift to Guide Dogs of America last a lifetime and beyond. The Partners in Trust Society was established by GDA to recognize and honor the generosity of those who have included the school in their planned giving. Providing life income gifts and bequests lets your gift continue working beyond your lifetime to help others achieve their goals with increased mobility and

independence through a partnership with a loyal and loving guide dog. Charitable organizations are not subject to gift or estate taxes so your gift continues to support the causes close to your heart, like Guide Dogs of America, without being diminished by the IRS.

As our way of thanking you, you will receive our special "Partners In Trust" crystal jar that you can display proudly, knowing the difference you are making in the lives of others through supporting Guide Dogs of America. Please call Rhonda Bissell at (818) 833-6432 for more information.

In Memory

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

Diane Morton — Class 381

The following guide dogs also have passed. Along with their partners, we thank them for their years of dedicated service and companionship:

Adam — Class 394

Basie — Class 391

Cosmo — Class 368

Dozer — Class 398

Gus — Class 351.5

Maisy — Class 360

Jamaica — Class 361

Radar — Class 361

2018 Quilt Raffle Winner

The very lucky winner of this year's quilt, "Doggie in the Window," is Juliana Bates from Sandy Spring, Maryland. We would like to thank again the Orange County Quilters Guild and Maryann Hertel for crafting and donating quilt.

Look for details about the 2019 Quilt Raffle in an upcoming issue of *Partners*.

Student Dormitory And Administration Building Renovations



Renovated Administration building



Rendering of Student Dormitory renovation.

GDA is proud to provide the campus with a renovation of our administration building and student dormitory. Upgrading these buildings will ensure the sustainability of our school and the success of our students for many years to come.

The square footage will remain the same in both buildings, but the space is being completely transformed and maximized. Plumbing, electrical, lighting, and mechanical systems have been upgraded to conserve both water and energy. The interiors have been reconfigured to create more inviting, comfortable, and accommodating living and sleeping areas, as well as collaborative workspaces. The exteriors of both buildings are also being resurfaced and a new landscape design will be incorporated to maintain continuity with the Visitor and Education Center.

New Employees

Tiffany McKillop, Nursery Tech

Lori Miller, Breeding Manager

Debbie Prince, Assistant Controller

Leave A Lasting Legacy

Guide Dogs of America –
Student Dormitory Renovation Project

Guide Dogs of America is pleased to announce that naming opportunities are now available for the newly renovated Student Dormitory. This is a truly unique and special way to support our programs, memorialize your commitment to our mission, and leave a legacy of giving for generations to come.

Naming donors will receive a tax acknowledgement letter upon receipt of your gift and a prominent donor recognition plaque will be placed outside the area you select to name. With your permission, your generous contribution to this project will further be acknowledged on our website and in our newsletter. Naming donors who make their gifts prior to June 1, 2019 will also be invited to the ribbon-cutting ceremony to be held during GDA's Open House on Saturday, June 22.

Please see the naming opportunities below and contact Lisa Peterson at 818.833.6429 if you are interested in being a part of this important project. Unless otherwise noted, all naming opportunities are individual sponsorships.

Thank you for your support.

Building:	\$300,000
Student Lobby:	\$125,000
Student Dining Hall:	\$100,000
Student Learning Center:	\$75,000
Kitchen:	\$50,000
Student Outdoor Lounge:	\$35,000
Dormitory Rooms: <i>(15 naming opportunities)</i>	\$25,000
Trainer Office:	\$20,000
Entrance Awning:	\$10,000
Dorm Laundry Room:	\$5,000
Dorm Room Patio: <i>(14 naming opportunities)</i>	\$5,000





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13445 Glenoaks Blvd. Sylmar, CA 91342
(818) 362-5834 FAX: (818) 362-6870

E-MAIL
mail@guidedogsofamerica.org

EDITOR
Lorri Bernson

WEBSITE
guidedogsofamerica.org



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13445 Glenoaks Blvd.
Sylmar, CA 91342

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Get *Partners* In Your Online Mailbox

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 and click on the "Partners" icon, located on the right side of homepage. Fill out the form with your email address and mailing address so we can remove you from the postage newsletter list.

GDA Calendar

February 9	Graduation <i>(students from in-home training)</i>
March 9	Graduation
April 6	Graduation
May 18	Graduation
May 19	Ride for Guides
June 22	Open House
September 28	Graduation
October 26	Graduation
Dec. 3 – 31	Fund-a-Need
December 14	Graduation

Congratulations Graduates

Due to dorm renovations, there was not a formal graduation at GDA this quarter, however there were several in-home trainings. These guide dog teams will be honored at a special graduation ceremony at the GDA campus on Saturday, March 9, 2019.

In-home Graduates (puppy raiser in parentheses):

Lorri Bernson and Captain (*Katherine and John Ugoretz*);
Lynn Coats and Koko (*The Ulstrup Family*); Jose Guzman
and Sargeant (*Vikki Mele*);
Marie Hoesman and
Noelle (*Rocio Crespo
& Lara Badcoe*); David
Steinmetz and Stetson
(*Laura Paxson and Family
and Browning Allen*);
Bonita Thompson and
Tess (*Diana Janke*); Julia
Winstead and Max (*Diona
and Alan Durham*)



Mission Statement

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