



partners  
Guide Dogs of America | Tender Loving Canines



## A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

***"Nothing is impossible for someone who feels hope for the future. The impossible turns into possible, and the unreal turns into reality. Hope sees potential in everything and drives us towards progress. Without it, we would stagnate in a place of conformity." —Christopher Reeve***

Everything we do at Guide Dogs of America (GDA) is predicated on hope. When we partner a client with a dog, we're not just helping heal a disability. Our guide/service dogs allow our clients to rewrite their destinies. Students who haven't left their houses in years go on to live lives full of adventure. Children with Autism who are barely verbal go on to graduate from college. Story after story, the partnerships we form help transform lives.

With the team of volunteers, donors, and staff we have assembled, our potential is limitless. **With your help, we have graduated 26 guide dog teams and 18 service dog teams in 2021.** This edition of our newsletter, the campus exclusive, will give you a sneak peek behind the scenes here at GDA. Included is an update on this year's biggest accomplishment: renovations to our puppy nursery and kennel center. You'll also experience a day in the life of a guide dog student.

**Together, we continue to turn the impossible into a reality.**

Countless individuals depend on us for a life-changing service dog. We are their hope. The more we continue to grow this organization, the more lives we can change.

I wish you and your family health and happiness this holiday season.

—Russell Gittlen, *President*



## A Day In The Life

### MARK HANOHANO

Students who are visually impaired arrive at our campus in Sylmar ready to embark on a life-changing adventure. Over the course of three weeks these individuals will stay in our state-of-the-art dorms, train with instructors, and, most importantly, meet the guide dogs that will transform their lives.

Mark Hanohano of Long Beach, California, is a programs coordinator at a non-profit for the visually impaired. After retiring his guide dog Colby last year, Mark returned to campus this summer to receive his fourth guide dog from GDA, Mamba. Here's a taste of Mark's experience.

### MAGIC OF THE MATCH

Throughout class, Mark learned how to work with Mamba and to care for and bond with him as well. Training includes giving commands, comfortably working with a harness, and navigating routes in many different situations. To achieve this goal, Mark and Mamba followed a rigorous daily schedule beginning at 6 AM and ending after 5 PM.

During a busy day of training at GDA, the student dormitory served as Mark's home base. Recently renovated in 2018, the dorms have been greatly improved since Mark's last stay at GDA. "Without a doubt, I enjoyed it more because of the new things, like a television in the room and a virtual assistant (Amazon Alexa™)," Mark says.

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"When we arrived on Sunday, everybody was very excited because we couldn't wait to meet our dogs, but we don't get them until Wednesday," he says. For the first three days, students get a feel for new commands by

working with a trainer holding an empty harness – a practice GDA calls "Juno."

The most rewarding part of Mark's experience, of course, was getting matched with Mamba. "You might think you could just get any dog because they all work the same. But the truth is, just like people, every dog is different," Mark says. **"One of the reasons I go back to GDA, again and again, is because of how well they do their matching."**

### RELEARNING THE ROPES

Our training department at GDA is always working on new methods to improve safety and effectiveness. So, even though Mark is an experienced guide dog handler, a lot has changed since he was last at GDA. "We're basically told,

'Forget everything that you know. You're learning everything all over again,'" he says.

Sydney Fujishige was Mark's trainer throughout the program. She shares, "Mamba is very different from Mark's past dogs because of the new training methods." For example, GDA now uses positive reinforcement training. "Rather than correcting a dog for a mistake they made, we simply don't reward them," explains Sydney. "When they do a good job, we build on that and get excited. Lots of praise is involved." Positive reinforcement doesn't stop at hugs and kisses. Students are taught that things like food, playtime, and grooming are all great ways to say "good job."

### FINDING THEIR GROOVE

Mark is most looking forward to going back to work as a program coordinator with Wayfinder Family Services. One of Mamba's most important responsibilities will be guiding Mark to and from work every day. Public transportation turns Mark's 24-mile commute into a two-hour trip. It includes a 45-minute train ride, a 30-minute bus connection, and another 45-minute train ride. "Commuting will be an experience for us, but public transportation was one of the things we worked hard on in class," he says.

All in all, the future looks bright for Mark and Mamba. "Mamba is a gentle giant. His guide work is also very, very good," Mark says. While the program was rigorous and rewarding for everyone involved, the end goal is more than worth it: a working partnership full of independence. Mark closes with, **"If there's a place that's special to my heart, it's GDA."** 🐾

## Building For A Better Future

The entire campus at Sylmar plays a role in our mission at GDA. But two particular facilities allow us to make it all possible – our puppy nursery and kennel center.

Built back in the 1980s, these areas were designed using industry standards to provide pups and staff with a safe and healthy environment. "Over the years, knowledge about disease control has come a long way," says Yvonne Martin, Director of Programs at GDA. Modernizing the two centers has been on Yvonne's "bucket list" for years. At the beginning of 2021, with help from generous donors, we broke ground on long-awaited renovations to the kennels and nursery center.

### KEEPING PUPPIES SAFE AND HEALTHY IN THE NURSERY

The nursery houses around 50 to 60 puppies at a time. Our nursery staff is constantly breeding and whelping to guarantee a pipeline of future service dogs. Newborn puppies are at significant risk for infection because they have yet to develop a strong immune system or receive vaccinations. Sanitation to mitigate disease is the top priority in the nursery.

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"During renovations, the entire nursery floor was coated in one solid epoxy layer. Epoxy is a non-porous, durable, non-corrosive coating that is easy to disinfect – ideal for preventing illnesses like Giardia from spreading, especially among neo-natal puppies.

Most noticeable in the renovations is the remodeling of the kitchen area. Our young puppies are voracious eaters, so it is essential our staff has a kitchen that will meet their nutritional needs. New surfaces, cabinetry, and appliances will help keep our puppies' bellies full for years to come.

Other additions include:

- AC units with sanitizing UV lights
- Locker systems for volunteers
- Stainless steel puppy bathtub

## CREATING A FRESH NEW INTERIOR IN THE KENNELS

With up to 120 dogs at any given time, our kennel center is always bustling. On the training side of the kennel, we board our long-term guests – guide dogs in training. On the boarding side of the kennel are the short-term guests – puppies-in-training, females in heat, or graduated service dogs for vacation visits. The kennel staff dedicates their time to caring for, feeding, grooming, socializing, and stimulating our guests.

Just as in the nursery, disease mitigation and safety are essential in the kennels. Epoxy layering was applied to the

entire facility, including the hallways, offices, vet center, and break room. We also installed new AC units and air filtration to keep our precious ones cool during the "dog days" of summer.

Old plumbing caused drainage difficulty, which can quickly spread disease. Contractors took jackhammers to the old concrete and then fitted upgraded piping. Plumbers then mounted hose reels that hang from the ceiling, preventing hose lines from carrying disease across the floor during sanitation. **"It's going to be much cleaner and much easier for us to take care of the dogs,"** says kennel tech Chris Medina of the new plumbing.

Since our dogs spend considerable time in these kennels, it is critical we keep their minds sharp and their moods

happy throughout their stay with us. "We went with custom-made systems from Mason Kennel," says Yvonne. "Instead of having six-inch wide grey cinderblock, the walls are now just two inches thick and brightly colored. A much happier environment." The vibrant, rainbow-colored panels installed are mentally stimulating and provide even more room for our guests.

Most of all, the Mason Midmark Kennel is an industry leader in sanitation. Their patented, state-of-the-art Silvis Seal™ is specifically designed to reduce the migration of germs between kennels – and prevent potential outbreaks of parvo, canine distemper, and other diseases.

Additional improvements in the kennel include:

- More windows for natural lighting
- All-new electrical wiring
- Safer small-gauge fencing
- New working space and offices for our staff and volunteers

## A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR DOGS, STAFF, AND CLIENTS

Although the renovations are a few weeks from completion, our facilities at GDA have already seen significant improvement. **The kennel staff has noticed the dogs are barking much less, signaling they are much happier in their new home away from home.** Construction is slated to be finished by January 2022. 🐾

## IN LOVING MEMORY

With sadness, we note the passing of the following graduates, guide dogs, service dogs, and breeders:

### GRADUATES:

- Betty Hansen, Class 413
- Bill Mlynarski, Class 398
- Wayne Aiken, Class 393
- William Shilling, Class 396

### GUIDE DOGS, SERVICE DOGS, AND BREEDERS:

- Guide Dog Aero Class 397
- Guide Dog Denali, Class 376
- Guide Dog Erin, Class 409
- Guide Dog Lex, Class 363
- Guide Dog Rocky, Class 377
- Guide Dog Sauly Class 396
- Service Dog Dotty, TLC

## NEW! PUPPY RAISING CORNER

# #WhyIRaise

It takes a special person to welcome a wiggly puppy into their heart and home. We are fortunate to work with a robust community of exceptional volunteer puppy raisers. We recently asked what motivates them to raise for GDA | TLC. Here's what they shared:

*"I raise because the difference a guide or service dog can make in someone's life is the best way I can make the world a better place."*  
—Becky Robelotto, South Bay Puppy Group

*"I raise so I can be a role model for the students at school. It's our responsibility to teach kids the importance of giving back to others."*  
—Holly Sjogren, Elementary School Teacher,  
Orange County Puppy Group

*"I raise to do something for others, and I benefit from being around an amazing community of volunteers."*  
—Mary Ellen Lefler, Ventura Puppy Group

*"We're raising this puppy so we can serve others sacrificially."*  
—Beth Siler and Family, Antelope Valley Puppy Group

*"I always knew I wanted to volunteer with GDA when I retired. I raise because I know I'm making a difference, and I love the puppy kisses and cuddles! If you love dogs, puppy raising is a win-win!"*  
—Lisa Schori, San Fernando Valley Puppy Group



Let us know why you raise!  
Post a comment and photo on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. Tag us @ **guidedogsofamerica** and use the hashtag **#WhyIRaise**. Live in Southern California? Text **"Puppy"** to **51555** to learn more about our program. 🐾



### SHOP GDA

To purchase, go to "Shop GDA" on **guidedogsofamerica.org**, or call **(818) 833-6429**.

### HOLIDAY CARDS

Available in packs of 10 cards with 10 envelopes. The message on the back reads, "May all that brings you happiness and joy be yours this holiday season and throughout the new year."

**PRICE: \$15.00**

Tax, shipping, and handling not included.  
If sending in a check, please call **818-362-5834** to determine the additional tax and shipping charges required for payment.

## 2021 QUILT RAFFLE

This year's cheerful and detailed quilt, "Pictures of My Dog," was crafted by the Santa Clarita Valley Quilt Guild. One very lucky person will have the chance to take it home after the drawing on **Friday, December 17th, 2021**. The cost is \$2 per ticket or \$10 for six tickets. Tickets can be purchased by mail, over the phone at **(818) 833-6429**, or in person at the school! If purchasing by mail, please include your address and phone number.



## GUIDE DOG GRADUATES

(puppy raisers in parentheses)



### Class #417

**TOP ROW:** Vernice Norris & Brasil (Smitherman Family), Mark Hanohano & Mamba (Yang Family), Giselle Herman & Livia (Denise Taylor)

**BOTTOM ROW:** Becky Griffin & Letty (Nancy Hawthorne & Roy Nitschke), Karen Lemmon & Rosco (Habegger Family)

**INSTRUCTORS:** Sydney Fujishige, Sean Chiles



### Class #418

**TOP ROW:** Natalia Pedroza & Cleo (Sherri & Matt Wette), Nanlyn Bearden & Ivy (Ramirez Family), Marty Lanter & Anderson (Kerry Muir)

**BOTTOM ROW:** Trudy & Harbor (Bob & Teri Smith), Beverly Hammet & Syros (Salas Family)

**INSTRUCTORS:** Sydney Fujishige, Kelsey Horst



### In-Home Graduates

Emily Wood & Daphne (Sam & Lori Rake)

**INSTRUCTOR:** Sean Chiles

## SERVICE DOG GRADUATES

(puppy raisers in parentheses)



### Class #06

**IN ROW:** Irene & Lennon, Christine & Lilo, Jim Reed & Triton, Trong & Sebastian, Gayle & Junior

**INSTRUCTORS:** Nicole Maples, Erin Vejar



### Class #07

**IN ROW:** Maricristina & Addie (Celeste Robertson), Erik & Astro, Maritza & Ursula

**INSTRUCTORS:** Erin Vejar



## Holidays of HOPE

This season, give the gift of love, confidence, and hope. Make your year-end gift to our "Holidays of Hope" campaign kicking off on #GivingTuesday, Nov. 30th.

**Are you doing your holiday shopping online this year?** Use Amazon and choose GDA as your charity of choice by selecting **International Guiding Eyes, Inc.** (our legal name) in the Amazon Smile portal at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com).

<b>■ Silver:</b>	
Single Kennel Dedication	\$6,000
<b>■ Gold:</b>	
Puppy Pen	\$25,000
<b>■ Platinum:</b>	
Section of 10 Kennels + Community Area	\$50,000

If you are interested in contributing to this important renovation, contact us at **(818) 833-6429** or scan the QR code.





Guide Dogs  
of America



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Canines

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## GET PARTNERS [DIGITAL EDITION]

If you would like to receive this newsletter by e-mail, simply go to **[guidedogsofamerica.org](http://guidedogsofamerica.org)** and click on the "Partners" icon located on the right side of the home page.



**OUR MISSION STATEMENT:  
TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS WITH SERVICE DOGS.**

## PARTNERS IN TRUST

Make your gift to Guide Dogs of America last a lifetime and beyond. GDA established the Partners in Trust Society to recognize and honor the generosity of those who have included us in their planned giving. Visit our website, or please call **Rhonda Bissell** at **(818) 833-6432** for more information.

Cut along dotted line



## MAKE A DONATION

If you would like to make a one time donation, please fill out the information below, cut along the dotted line and use the provided envelope to mail in your donation. If paying by check, please make check payable to **Guide Dogs of America**.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Cash ☐ Check ☐ Credit Card Donation Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_



Donating to GDA-TLC has never been easier. Open the QR code reader or camera app on your phone and hold your device over the QR code to give today!