



partners
Guide Dogs of America | Tender Loving Canines



A New Era for the Breeding Program

Guide Dogs of America puppies are born with a purpose—to become life-transforming partners. One of GDA's main objectives has been improving our breeding program, and, with a complete overhaul that began four years ago, it has quickly become one of the best in the nation.

GDA puppies might look like your standard Labrador Retriever, Golden Retriever, or German Shepherd, but they have the DNA of a service dog. Their genetic makeup has been refined for decades to create the perfect working canine. The breeding community calls this "purpose-bred quality"—dogs born to perform a single task.

Breeding purpose-bred quality dogs is a complex process. In 2018, GDA tasked Rachel Goldammer with rebuilding our colony. Goldammer previously worked as the breeding manager at Southeastern Guide Dogs and has a BS in Animal Science and Reproduction.

Continued on page 2



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to the first edition of this year's Partners Newsletter. I have always believed it is our responsibility to place as many service dog teams as possible. All the progress we have made in recent years has us expanding, with a goal of increasing our output by five teams this year.

That said, with growth comes inevitable growing pains. Now that Tender Loving Canines (TLC) is fully merged into our organization, and the renovations are complete, it is time for us to concentrate our energy on the programs here at home.

Our team is calling 2022 "the year of programs" and we have hit the ground running, hiring long-needed positions in the kennel, veterinarian, and puppy departments. Enhancing the Guide Dogs of America (GDA) experience for puppy raisers, students, volunteers, and donors is our top priority.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter. We have worked hard to improve our breeding program and you will see just how much it is paying off. Our schedule of events is listed on the back. I greatly encourage you to make it to a graduation—a moment you will never forget—or participate in one of our fundraisers.

—Russell Gittlen
President





Continued from page 1

While GDA will never have a 100% placement rate from birth to service, we can improve our success by leveraging the dogs' genetics. Through genetic testing, breeders can pair dogs that carry recessive genes for specific conditions with dogs that do not. They can rebreed dogs with the right temperament, drive to work, and clean health. And they can avoid breeding dogs with genetic problems like dysplasia, cataracts, muscular dystrophy, and degenerative myopathy.

"You always have to look critically at your colony and be willing to make difficult decisions about the dogs, breeders, and puppies," Goldammer says. "Kennel Blindness" happens when breeders turn a blind eye to issues within a colony. "You might fall in love with a certain dog and you ignore the issues in their line."

LEVERAGING DATA FOR BETTER INSIGHTS – AND BETTER BREEDING

Even with strong genetic testing, problems can persist without a sound system for organizing and leveraging the genetic data. Using her knowledge of breeding and genetics, Rachel transformed GDA's data into a generational database. The database allows Rachel and her team to glean valuable insight into their breeding colony.

"All of the data that had been stored on Excel sheets was turned into estimated breeding values," Goldammer explains. "You take information about a dog's health and enter it into a very complicated equation. The results tell you the genetic potential each dog has."

The entire GDA breeding colony was put into this database and the team found that the colony was successful at working, but had many inheritable

problems. "Whenever you release dogs for health, you take it personally. The pain, decreased lifespan, and potential surgeries, is something I never want to be responsible for putting a dog through," she says.

The solution was to restart the breeding program. Over a three-month period in 2018, GDA released dozens of breeders. Next, we flew in purpose-bred studs and puppies from other service dog programs around the country.

The new breeders allowed GDA to diversify our dogs' genetics and mitigate many genetic issues plaguing our colony.

THE RESULTS: MORE SUCCESSFUL PUPS AND BETTER USE OF FUNDING

Within two years of implementing the new database and colony, Goldammer and the breeding team have already seen remarkable improvement.

"Within one generation, we went from an 18% release rate down to about 5%. By the second generation, we are now below 2%," she says. "The majority of our career changes (dogs that don't graduate) are now the result of non-genetic issues. They're exclusively related to training or temperament."

Reducing severe problems has allowed the breeding team to focus on more nuanced genetic traits, like allergies, thyroid issues, and cancers. They can also spend more time diving into characteristics like temperament, stress management, and willingness to work.

There is also a financial upside. GDA is using our funding more efficiently by releasing fewer dogs from the program. It costs around \$60,000 to turn a puppy into a guide dog. "By producing genetically healthy and stable litters, you're taking responsibility not only for the dogs you produce but also for the funds you are using," Goldammer says. "Knowing that the changes we made four years ago are continuing to create healthier, more stable dogs with happier, healthier lives is extremely rewarding."

Goldammer recently attended the graduation of one of the first litters she bred at GDA. Now two years old, the H-Litter saw eight of nine dogs find work, a tremendous accomplishment.

You will read more about the H-Litter later on... 

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

"A life without a dog would be a life without purpose," says Dawn Giterman, who recently named GDA in her estate.

Giterman spent her career as a successful hair colorist at a high-end Los Angeles salon. Semi-retired now, she shares, "I was incredibly lucky with my career. But growing up, I never anticipated having a home or investments. I never even thought I'd have money!"

When it came time to write a will, Giterman struggled. She openly shares: "I am single, never married with no kids, and have no close family. I didn't know whom to leave it all to... it's not like I can leave it to my Maltese Luca."

That was until one day, a client/friend of hers mentioned that she named GDA in her charitable trust. Giterman remembered seeing the puppies in training at the Hollywood Bowl and was impressed with how well they behaved. Her friend then said, "You love your dogs, right? **Invest in what you love.**" That was when she knew GDA was the perfect partner for her estate.

As someone who suffers from anxiety, Giterman understands just how important dogs are. "I've had



dogs for 25 years, and I can't tell you how much they've helped me. They get me out of the house. I've met my neighbors, I go to the dog park — they make your life better. They help you get through things in life that you just can't on your own," she says.

Giterman wants to be an example for other single people who don't have anyone to leave their estate. She ends by saying, **"Knowing these dogs will change people's lives, that I am going to help others — I could not think of a better place for my estate to go."**

PARTNERS IN TRUST

Make your gift to GDA last a lifetime and beyond. We established the Partners in Trust Society to recognize the generosity of those who have included GDA in their planned giving. Visit our website, or call **Zachary Gittlen** at **(818) 833-6426** for more information. 🐾

PROFILES: H-Litter Superstars!

INTRO: Born in 2018, after a push for improvements to the breeding program, the H-Litter is a nine-puppy litter with an extraordinary success rate. **Out of the nine puppies born, eight found a job.** As guide dogs, service dogs, and breeders, this outstanding litter is transforming lives.



HEIDI H-Litter Breeder

Heidi is co-owned by Freedom Service Dogs,

a Colorado-based organization that specializes in providing service dogs for veterans. Heidi has given birth to two litters split between Freedom Service Dogs and GDA to help maximize genetic diversity.



HARVEST H-Litter Breeder

Harvest was identified as having the genetic

potential to become a breeder — just like her sister Heidi. Harvest's mother, Shipley, was born from a litter produced by Brian — GDA's top-producing stud throughout the 2010s. Harvest has already given birth to two litters and will hopefully produce two more litters in her lifetime.



HARBOR H-Litter Guide Dog

Harbor was the last graduate of the H-Litter, graduating in

November 2021. His puppy raisers named him Harbor because he will go on to serve as a place of safety for his owner. Harbor and his siblings **Harry, Hank, Hazel,** and **Hailey** will serve as guide dogs.

Puppy Raising Corner

"It all started during COVID-19 when I kept seeing posts on Facebook to become a puppy raiser for GDA|TLC. We had been to one meeting at GDA, and now the timing was perfect for us. Fast-forward nearly two years and our puppy Claire is now in for training and on her way to becoming someone's perfect guide or service dog."



*We are so grateful for all the GDA people we have met. It took a lot of training, outings, and meetings, and GDA supported us all along the way. **It has been a fulfilling, meaningful, and touching experience – one our family will never forget.** We will always cherish our time with Claire, and we're excited about her future."*

—Karen Minderhout Family

If you are interested in helping raise a puppy to become someone's perfect guide or service dog, you can learn more by texting **"PUPPY"** to **51555**. 🐾

Celebrating Outstanding Careers

Please join us in congratulating staff members Rhonda Bissell and Linda Hawes on their retirements from GDA|TLC.

On behalf of GDA|TLC and our entire community, we want to extend our deepest gratitude for all they have given to our organization. We are a stronger organization because of their work. We wish Rhonda and Linda all the very best as they enjoy this next chapter of their lives. 🐾



RHONDA BISSELL
Director of Development



LINDA HAWES
Guide Dog Mobility Instructor



SHOP GDA

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

STRIPED POLO

Whether you are hitting the golf course, or going to a business meeting, represent GDA|TLC with our new striped polo. The shirt is made of high-quality certified eco-friendly recycled polyester and is blended for stretch, a cooling effect, and UPF sun protection. Available in Men's S-3XL.

PRICE: \$65.00

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.



2022 QUILT RAFFLE – "DOGGIE DIVAS"

This year's beautiful and detailed quilt, "Doggie Divas," was crafted by the Quilt Squad! A friendship group comprised of members from the Orange County Quilters Guild. One very lucky person will have the chance to take it home after the drawing on **Friday, December 16, 2022**. 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. (Quilt measures 62.75in x 61in)



Zola Goes to France: GDA Sends a German Shepherd to Europe

German Shepherds were once the breed of choice for training guide dogs at GDA. Their loyalty, intelligence, and work ethic make them excellent companions and service dogs. Labradors have since replaced them as the standard for guide and service dogs. But recently, there has been a renewed demand for the hard-working breed. In response, GDA has committed to bolstering its shepherd lines.

Meet Zola and Zephyr, two German Shepherds recently born and bred at GDA. Both sisters had outstanding medical and temperament evaluations for breeding.

Yet, there was a problem: Keeping Zola and Zephyr in the same colony could

“Whenever we ask another school for a stud or puppy, we want to make sure the genetics we’re introducing to our colony are in line with our excellent standards,”

**—Rachel Goldammer
Breeding Specialist at GDA**

create issues with inbreeding. To avoid this trouble, GDA decided to seek out a partner school for breeding. GDA frequently trades with other service dog schools across the country to improve diversity and strengthen bloodlines. But since very few schools in North America breed German Shepherds, it was difficult to find the right partner.

After a lot of research, they found a partner school in France — a first for GDA. The Centre d’Etude, de Sélection, et d’Elevage de Chiens uides d’Aveugles et autres Handicapés (CESECAH) is a national breeding center that produces and distributes puppies to all the service dog schools in France.

Goldammer hopped on a plane to France with Zola, who would help both schools increase their genetic diversity. In return, CESECAH sent a Labrador Retriever to GDA.

STUDYING ABROAD

Zola’s life in France looks a lot like it did on American soil. Both schools are part of the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF), which holds strict guidelines and expectations for its members. She is being meticulously taken care of by CESECAH staff and has quickly adapted to her new life. The one challenge for Zola in France has been the language barrier. Even when spoken in English, commands sound slightly different with a French accent. Despite that, she is making GDA proud and even learning a bit of French along the way.

If everything goes to plan, Zola will breed and have puppies on French soil. Not only that, but the two centers may continue to partner and grow together. “It’s a great example of schools sharing genetics that they’ve fostered for years,” Goldammer says. “We’re very excited about this partnership.” 💕

SAVE THE DATES – 2022 EVENTS

MARCH

- 3/19: Guide Dog Graduation

APRIL

- 4/30: Service Dog Graduation

MAY

- 5/1–13: Walk, Run, Ride, Whatever
- 5/14: Open House

JUNE

- 6/25: Guide Dog Graduation

JULY

- 7/17–20: IAM Kourpias K-9 Classic
- 7/30: Service Dog Graduation

AUGUST

- 8/13: Dinner in the Dark

SEPTEMBER

- Calendar Contest

OCTOBER

- 10/8: Guide Dog Graduation
- 10/29: Service Dog Graduation

NOVEMBER

- 11/17–19: Las Vegas Charity Weekend



Guide Dogs
of America



Tender Loving
Canines

13445 Glenoaks Blvd.
Sylmar, CA 91342

TEL: (818) 362-5834

FAX: (818) 362-6870

E-MAIL: mail@guidedogsofamerica.org

WEBSITE: guidedogsofamerica.org

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

LOS ANGELES, CA
PERMIT NO. 2181

GET PARTNERS [DIGITAL EDITION]

If you would like to receive this newsletter by e-mail, simply go to **guidedogsofamerica.org** and click on the "Newsletter Sign-up" icon located at the bottom of the home page.



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

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 or in your web browser type, **give.guidedogsofamerica.org/PNL37**