



partners

Guide Dogs of America | Tender Loving Canines



Paw and Order

A COURTROOM CANINE THAT BRINGS COMFORT AND COMPASSION

No one would compare a day in court to a sunny tropical island, but there is a delightful new addition to a courthouse in Alabama whose job is to make everyone's day a little brighter.

Meet Fiji, the facility dog who was brought in by Mobile County Assistant District Attorney Chris McDonough to help crime victims and their families deal with the anxiety and stress of coming to court. Fiji was hand-picked for the team after graduating from GDA|TLC's prison program, where dogs are trained by incarcerated individuals in the state of California. "I think it does sort of complete the circle," says Asst. DA McDonough. "We are trying to prosecute crimes on behalf of victims. Now we have a dog that is going to help us do that, who was trained by people who have offended."

Fiji has training in assistive, grounding, and social tasks. For the people he meets in the courtroom, many of whom are children, domestic violence victims, or victims of a violent crime, his work is a steadying force. From the district attorney's office to the courtroom, Fiji is a remarkably intuitive and calming presence whose job starts the minute a new person comes to the office. From then on, he attends court for each and every appearance they may have. If that person must testify on the stand, Fiji will sit at or on their feet to provide comfort while they are making their statement.

Asst. DA McDonough is truly impressed with the effect that a dog in the courtroom can have.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings,

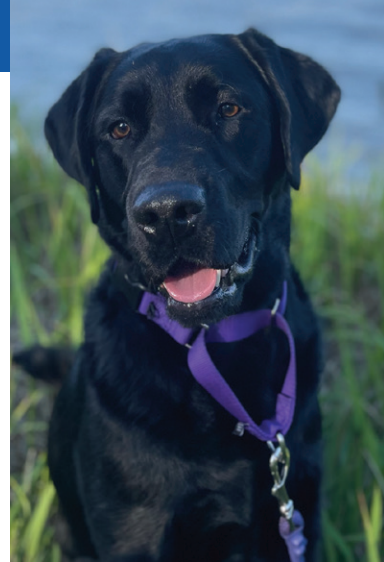
Spring is here, and we are excited to share with you all that we are doing to bring service dogs to those in need. Our mission is to transform lives through partnerships with service dogs, and for me, that means serving as many people as we possibly can. With that said, our growth cannot be rushed. We must work strategically to safeguard the high standard we have set for ourselves.

This year we have focused on improving our prison program, which trains many of our service dogs. It is an integral part of our operation these days, and we are committed to enhancing this program because not only will it result in more highly skilled service dogs, but it also has an overwhelmingly positive impact on the incarcerated trainers.

I want to personally congratulate Yvonne Martin on her retirement from Guide Dogs of America | Tender Loving Canines (GDA|TLC). She has left an indelible mark on this program, and we cannot thank her enough. We have promoted Jamie Hunt to Director of Programs, and I have complete confidence in her ability to lead GDA|TLC into our next chapter.

From everyone here at GDA|TLC, we are grateful for your continued support and ongoing commitment. With your help, we can continue to make a difference in the lives of those who need it most. Let us make this year a time of growth, hope, and positive change together. 🐾





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He says, "It is really apparent why it is so important. The courtroom goes from a very serious environment to where you can just feel the air come back into the room... Fiji brings a ray of sunshine into what could have been a very dark day for the people he helps."

Fiji has an all-access pass within the courthouse. He can go with a victim or witness on the stand before judge and jury – applying his specialized training. Fiji

"The courtroom goes from a very serious environment to where you can just feel the air come back into the room... Fiji brings a ray of sunshine into what could have been a very dark day for the people he helps."

—Chris McDonough

is also available to go to the grand jury if requested. When helping a victim prepare for trial, Fiji will lay his body on the anxious person's lap or feet, providing deep pressure therapy, which calms the nervous system with soothing, gentle compression. The victim often feels fear and stress dissipate as Fiji sits patiently

and silently, ensuring they are comfortable enough to give their statement.

"We have seen defendants plead guilty once they realize their victims are emotionally ready to testify," McDonough explains. Fiji is able to provide acceptance and a sense of safety to those who experience trauma.

He builds a rapport and trust during a time when many of the victims have lost trust in others. This favorably impacts the outcomes in court and helps puts perpetrators of violent crimes behind bars."

Working with children is one of Fiji's specialties.

A child will be brought to the courthouse for a grand jury orientation prior to testifying. This can be a frightening experience, which is why Fiji is introduced at this point. Fiji is a welcoming presence each time they visit the courthouse office, and when it is time for their trial, that person or child has already built a friendship with their faithful friend, Fiji. As one victim's family member said, "As their court date approaches, their buddy Fiji becomes a focus of empowerment and comfort."

A young victim recently recounted to McDonough, **"I was so excited to see Fiji again that I didn't think about being scared to come to court."** Once they are in the courtroom, the child feels the warmth of Fiji by their side, and the child's demeanor changes. With their nerves steadied, they are better able to concentrate and recount crucial details.

In addition to playing a supportive role within the court system, Fiji has been earning top marks with new police recruits. Going through the academy and preparing for examinations can be an extremely stressful experience. If exams are not passed, then recruits cannot advance in their training, which is why McDonough has integrated classroom visits into Fiji's activities. "Fiji just soaks up the tension like a sponge," McDonough says. "He is able to laser focus on those in need of support and give them a boost of anxiety-reducing confidence." The proof is in the results, as more recruits are passing exams with flying colors.

At the end of the workday, Fiji returns with McDonough to their bustling home, greeted at the front door by three cats, two additional Labradors and five teenagers. Always aware of the emotional needs of his family, Fiji can often be found quietly at the feet of whoever in the McDonough family needs a little extra emotional support at the end of a busy day. 🐾

You can read more about Chris and Fiji's adventures in their flipbook on our blog!
<https://www.guidedogsofamerica.org/fiji-a-facility-dog/>



Working at the “Paw-ffice”

**A DAY IN MY LIFE
BY FIJI**

Woof! I am Fiji, a black Labrador, and I'll be three years old in June. All the puppies in my litter were named with the letter “F,” and I got lucky enough to be named after a beautiful tropical island. But that vacation will have to wait because I've got an important job to do!

No alarm clock needed for me! I start the day with playtime in the backyard, then after breakfast, I have my teeth and my coat brushed, and then it's into the car with Assistant District Attorney McDonough for a short ride to the office. After a few sniffs around the parking lot, my leash goes on, and I step into my vest, signaling that I am ready to get to work.

Everyone greets me with a smile as I walk down the hallway to the office, where I attend to some paperwork – correction – where Asst. DA McDonough attends to business, and I take a little nap until I'm called for duty. As soon as there are victims to meet or a judge has requested me in the courtroom, I am ready for action. Every day is different, but I am always patient and supportive of all the people I meet, both large and small. This is what I was trained to do, and I love bringing a little sunshine into what could be a very dark day for someone.

Back at home, I hang out and relax with the family. As the unofficial mascot of the local Boy Scout troop, I may attend a meeting or event. If I am lucky, I get to go camping – so I guess I may get that vacation after all! 🐾



New Adventures Await for Yvonne Martin

The selection and nurturing of a successful guide dog is a vital and elaborate process. From finding the perfectly suited individual, through hours of training and growth, to the moment that their full potential is reached, it is an invaluable journey that benefits everyone involved.

It can be said that our treasured Yvonne Martin has trod a similar path. Yvonne started with Guide Dogs of America in 1989 as a puppy raiser. Yvonne had raised several dogs before joining the organization, and during her tenure, she saw two of her trainees graduate as guides and even co-opted her mother into sewing the puppy jackets! Her devotion extended not only to her own canine charges but also to the well-being of all the four-legged friends. She parlayed her education as a volunteer into a full-time job, working in the



to advocate for the merger of GDA and TLC, expanding the program to provide highly skilled companions for veterans, individuals with autism, and facilities – marrying the two service dog programs together under one umbrella. This merger occurred in large part due to

Yvonne and her unshakable resolve to put more dogs into the hands and hearts of people who need them.

Described as “tough on the outside and funny on the inside” by her co-workers, Yvonne has been instrumental in all aspects of the growth and development of GDA|TLC. She has played a lead role in securing her replacement, although she did not have to look far, with her protégée and previous assistant director Jamie Hunt assuming the role. Jamie understands she has some pretty big shoes to fill as her promotion to director of programs takes effect but knows she has had a great role model. “I have never met someone so passionate and dedicated to an organization and a mission statement,” she says.

Louise Henderson, puppy department manager, echoes what many have shared: “Yvonne put her whole heart and soul into the organization.” Louise adds, “Yvonne had tremendous focus and drive but also a wonderful sense of humor and could always be counted on to crack jokes even in stressful situations.”

From the wag of the tail to cheers and barks, it is hard to sum up in words our enduring appreciation for Yvonne Martin. Thank you, Yvonne, for your 20+ years of dedication to our mission. We wish you the best of luck in all your future endeavors. 🐾



puppy department in 1999. She spent a year there before moving into training, where she completed a three-year apprenticeship. Over the course of the following 10 years, Yvonne assisted in canine development, the puppy program, and breeding before rising to assume the director of programs position.

In 2015, Yvonne was chosen to be an assessor with the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF). The IGDF is a global organization composed of more than 85-member guide dog organizations in 28 countries. One of 27 assessors in the world, Yvonne ensured that the rigorous standards of the guide dog program were upheld worldwide. Throughout her work with the IGDF, Yvonne helped develop new innovative mobility training techniques and worked to raise awareness of guide dog work throughout the world.

Yvonne’s legacy at GDA|TLC is beautifully displayed each and every day through her instrumental participation in the building of the new kennel facility. Yvonne meticulously researched and identified areas in need of an overhaul, such as ensuring that new flooring provided ample drainage as well as a comfortable surface for paws, and finding UV lighting that kills airborne disease. She also envisioned an innovative architectural revision that maximized usable space, creating oversized kennels with extra leg room. Yvonne added splashes of color to stimulate the eyes of not only employees but the dogs too! The end result is a shining and welcoming example of her contribution and dedication to the organization and her tireless efforts to raise the standards of excellence.

But it is not only the pooches that Yvonne has impacted. She has been a constant source of inspiration to her team – both the recipients of the service dogs and those who help train them. As a leader, Yvonne both nurtured and empowered those around her – going out of her way to help them excel.

It is her keen ability to see the power and potential in both human and canine interaction that led Yvonne



EVENTS CALENDAR 2023

Jun 3	Open House	Aug 5	Service Dog Graduation
Jun 22	Blood Drive at GDA TLC	Aug 26	Dinner in the Dark
Jul 1	Guide Dog Graduation	Oct 14	Guide Dog Graduation
Jul 28-31	IAM Kourpias K-9	Nov 11	Las Vegas Charity Banquet

GRADUATES

(PUPPY RAISERS IN PARENTHESES)

GUIDE DOG CLASS #422

Fernando & Lewis (The Walters Family), Chris & Harlan (The Walters Family), Andy & Oxford (Charlene & Alex Gagnon), Aubree & Bishop (AJ & Lexi Rose Jonesco), Kimberly & Zeppelin (Mia Anderson), Louis & Tycho (Theé Comeau & Jed Fuhrman), Lynn & Kira (Kimberly Kessel)

INSTRUCTORS: Sydney Fujishige, Kelsey Horst



GUIDE DOG CLASS #423

IN ROW: Carmella & Wednesday (Maybaum Family), Laurel & Sergeant (Betty Borowski), Jacob & Anderson (Kerry Muir), David & Ivan (Ann Larson), Priscilla & Zophia (Bob Stegemann)

INSTRUCTORS: Analise Mendoza, Sydney Fujishige, Sean Chiles, Jasmine Versales



SERVICE DOG CLASS #11

Amrapali & Fozzy (Kristi Galarneau), Jennifer (Apprentice Trainer), LeVar & Pinot (Joyce Finan), Catherine & Lupin (Julia Dixon), Timothy & Comet (Meredith LaBonge), Amanda & Bobby (Laura Chiara), Staci & Keeper (Holly Sjogren), Kaylie & Hadley (Ginny Miller), Kelli & Maya (Erin Eatmon), Heydi & Escort (Monique Newman)

INSTRUCTORS: Cheryl Herman, Nicole Maples, Gretchen Chomas, Sonia Parisi



SERVICE DOG CLASS #12

Ali & Olive (Kirk Brunke), Tamra & Tavi (Matt & Kate Silberstein), Jessica & Rico (Kathy Seldow), Brown & Wander (Mitchell Kaufman), Christina & Brooklyn (Nathalie Roque), Leslie & Jeter (Beth Rodgers), Linda & Owen (Esther & Ashley Chen), Billy & Phinn (Tracy Sampson), April & Comet (Meredith LaBonge)

INSTRUCTORS: Sonia Parisi, Nicole Maples, Jennifer Bohan



Guide Dogs
of America



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

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