



partners

Guide Dogs of America | Tender Loving Canines



A Perfect Match:

EUGENE KIM & OPAL

Volunteers at Guide Dogs of America | Tender Loving Canines (GDA|TLC) have a tremendous impact on people's lives. From retirees to long-time supporters—even our very own graduates — our volunteers come from all walks of life!

Meet Eugene Kim and his guide dog, Opal. This dynamic duo has recently begun volunteering at GDA|TLC as a way of giving back to a place that has given them so much.

Eugene lives in La Crescenta, California, with his wife, Jane. His two daughters, ages 15 and 19, are his pride and joy, and he loves nothing more than spending time with them. "I used to drive the family around... I loved driving! I would take my girls camping, to Universal [Studios], and skiing in Mammoth!" Eugene explains.

He recalls, "It was the day after Christmas in 2019. I was driving home, and that's when I noticed there was just something a little bit off with my right eye." Initially, he thought he just needed a check-up. But Eugene quickly realized this was something more serious. "When it started happening in

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings,

Everyone deserves a future filled with hope and opportunity. That core belief is what led Joseph Jones to found this school 75 years ago. With the team of volunteers, donors, and staff we have assembled, we can be that light.

This year, we graduated 56 new teams from Guide Dogs of America | Tender Loving Canines (GDA|TLC), a number I take great pride in. That's 56 people who now have a loving and loyal companion to brighten their days. It's 56 people who now feel safe enough to navigate the world with confidence and independence. Together, we helped 56 people change the course of their future, allowing them to dream of things they never thought possible.

Our village here at GDA|TLC continues to turn the impossible into a reality. We are grateful for our fundraisers, volunteers, and donors, whose altruistic support continues to make our mission possible. 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.

Sincerely,

Russell Gittlen

Russell Gittlen, President
GDA|TLC





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my left eye, I began to panic," he says.

Over the next 3-4 weeks, Eugene's sight rapidly deteriorated. The small pieces of blurred vision gradually became one giant blur. Struggling to get appointments during the Covid shutdown, Eugene was eventually diagnosed with Glaucoma — his life forever changed.

At the time, Eugene had a successful career as a designer at Fandango, where he led his own design team. "I would have never thought this would happen to me, especially in the middle of my life," Eugene states. While his employers were highly supportive throughout his vision loss, providing him with accessible screens and keyboards, it was ultimately too much. After almost 20 years as a designer, Eugene made the difficult decision to resign at the end of 2022.

"It totally changed my life," Eugene explains. Even little hobbies he enjoyed, such as going to the hardware store, became more challenging than leisurely. "I love the hardware store. I could spend half a day there just picking up random stuff!" he says with a smile as he reminisces.

Eugene first heard about our guide dog program through one of his wife's patients, who volunteers at GDA|TLC. Once accepted into the program, Eugene couldn't wait to take advantage of the opportunity. He recalls his initial experience in class, "For the first few days, we are training with an imaginary dog (JUNO)." A process that can be monotonous for students yearning

to meet their exciting new partners. It isn't until the third day of class that students are finally matched with their dogs.

"The trainers sit you down in your room, and you can hear them knock on the door as they introduce other students to their dogs... and I am one of the last doors," he recalls as he waited anxiously. "And then she comes in, and you are just overjoyed!" he smiles wide, "This is reality, a living being who is going to guide me! My forever friend!" Opal, a Yellow Labrador retriever, has been with Eugene nearly 24/7 since. He remembers feeling speechless and delighted.

His experience with the trainers remains just as memorable. "I call them friends because they've helped me so much, personally and professionally." Eugene continues, "I remember the first time I got to walk with her, and just feeling her lead me was an amazing experience because it wasn't me shuffling anymore. It's just automatic for her to go around obstacles... it's such an incredible feeling!"

"Being able to take my regular routes [with Opal] was really incredible! It made me feel free. It made me feel confident," he recollects with a smile. Before matching with Opal, Eugene struggled to ride the bus alone and find his seat. "With [Opal], it's as if she's a person with you- like having your friend with you, and it just makes things a little more comfortable," he explains.

Improving his mobility isn't the only thing Opal has done for Eugene. She's done something else as well. **"She's helped me get over this feeling of shame that I had, maybe because I felt like a burden to society. Not working made me feel useless like I couldn't contribute. Opal has shown me that isn't true."** Petting her gently by his side, he says, "She depends on me, and I depend on her." 🐾

A Baker's Dozen

WRITTEN BY CAROLE ROSNER

"Puppy, puppy, puppy!" we call as 13 puppies come running from around the corner. The "R" litter, a boisterous and adorable furry baker's dozen, spent a week this past September learning and socializing in GDA|TLC's Puppy Head Start Program. Hundreds of litters have gone through head start over the last nine years, with this family of 13 being one of the largest.

Training at GDA|TLC starts on day one for these future helpers. Brave individuals, called "Puppy-Huggers," begin holding and socializing the puppies while they're still in the nursery. Once they're four weeks old, the puppies are big enough to venture out of their whelping bays for pre-school. Volunteers work with the puppies for an hour each day, socializing them to different sites, sounds, and feels. This continues almost every day until they begin Head Start at 7 weeks.

When they come to Head Start, they are in a new kennel area with a much more room to play and adventure. They have volunteers with them all day from Monday to Friday. Lead Head Start volunteer Diana Janke says there are approximately 50 volunteers on the roster, and I'm thrilled to be part of the group. Why? Because during a three-and-a-half-hour shift, Head Start is one of the most exuberant, frantic, exhausting, and loving places



I've ever been. Although the puppies can be very vocal and very messy, being a volunteer is just so much fun.

Dogs are in every corner—playing tug of war with a litter mate over a braided rope toy, rolling around in a giant plastic tunnel, and escaping under a chair for some alone time. The puppies don't get their official names until they go home, so we volunteers use their colored or patterned collars to identify them. "Where's Pink," "What's Gray doing?" "Look what Rainbow is doing now."

It's incredible to watch giant paws and little bodies clumsily find their place in the world. The puppies' sense of smell may be keen, but their sense of balance still needs some work—all climbing, chasing, squealing, and skidding through the kennels. Personalities among the puppies differ litter by litter, but we can tell who is shy or mischievous within minutes. The many slides, steps, tables, and ladders are meant to build confidence, initiate play, and give them a place to romp around.

These puppies are fast, frisky, and bold. They love to be cuddled, but not for too long. They have other places to go and things to explore. Puppies frolic in their water bowls, are mesmerized by a bee, and can get cranky with each other. Anything left on the ground is of interest, and they discover things to eat in every nook and cranny. We serve their meals in individual crates, and they loudly let everyone know when it's feeding time.

These puppies are quick studies, and at their young age, they already understand that treats are on the way when we say "nice" in a high-pitched voice. We also work with the puppies on recall, tie-down, crate training, and body handling. Diana explained that the Head Start experience is more like what the dogs will do





once they are taken home, and by introducing them to these behaviors while they are still on campus, we are installing a foundation for their puppy raisers to build on.

After hours of activity, the pups will spontaneously and collectively fall asleep anywhere they can, and often on top of each other—they truly embody the word “dog pile.” It’s hilarious to see that when one wakes up, they all do. Apparently, no one wants to be left out of the action!

At the end of their week in Head Start, the pups get bathed, named, and meet their Puppy Raisers. All dogs receive a take-home bag filled with the essential items. They’ll get a volunteer-made blanket, food, stuffed animals and chew toys, a purple collar, a leash, and a car tie-down. They also get a paw pad used for puppy K training that starts soon after they leave GDA/TLC.

When my shift as a volunteer is over, I’m usually a bit tired. Nonetheless, I leave with a sense of happiness and pride, having had the privilege to work with these dogs at the beginning of their amazing journeys. 🐾

Holidays of HOPE

HOLIDAYS OF HOPE 2023

We believe that everyone deserves to have a future filled with hope and opportunity. By supporting our Holidays of Hope campaign, you will bring light into someone’s life by way of a loving and loyal service dog.

Beginning on Giving Tuesday, November 28th through the end of the year, every Dollar up to \$120,000 will be matched by Jane Huey and the Huey Family Foundation

STATISTICS:

We lose 20 U.S Veterans to suicide every day

*Source: “2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report”, www.mentalhealth.va.gov/

1 in 36 children is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder

*Source “Autism Statistics and Facts”, Autismspeaks.org

Only 44% of people who are blind/visually impaired are employed

38% turned down a job because of transportation concerns

*Source “Reviewing the Disability Employment Research on People who are Blind or Visually Impaired: Key Takeaways”, www.AFB.org

GIVING LEVELS

■ Provide Students Hope – \$1,000

You gift will support the training our students receive on campus, where they are partnered with a life-transforming service dog.

■ Give our Pupils Confidence – \$500

Provide one service dog in training the essentials they’ll need while learning their important new job.

■ Sending Puppies Love – \$300

Ensure our young puppies have everything they need to learn and become confident, loving service dogs.

■ Ensuring a Healthy Future – \$100

Help our puppies start off on the right foot by covering the cost of their newborn care, microchip, and vaccines.



GRADUATES (PUPPY RAISERS IN PARENTHESES)



GUIDE DOG CLASS #425

FROM LEFT: Greg Steinmetz & Sterling (Christina Veil & Family), Anna Garzya & Aiko (Jennifer Fetterman), Roselyn Perez & Eddie (Audrey Rohrer), Eric Harvath & Gumbo (The Kim Family), Jill Anderson & Spirit (The Kollen Family), Lex Darrow & Oxford, (Charlene Gagnon), David Dowland & Dev (The Kasman Family)

INSTRUCTORS: (from Left): Jamie Hunt, Sean Chiles, Jasmine Versales

IN LOVING MEMORY

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

GRADUATES

- Tony Connett, Class 402
- Jaimeson Meza, Class 370

BREEDERS

- Brian Keely

GUIDE DOGS

- A.D. #365
- Eski #384
- Fennix Class #371
- Gracy #373
- Hunter #379
- Joey #377
- Lucas #375
- Niklaus #393
- Osmond #389
- Otto-V #394
- Portia #396
- Promise #363
- Smokey #376
- Summit #398
- Trinity #390



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Guide Dogs
of America



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

Cut along dotted line



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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**.

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