



partners

Guide Dogs of America | Tender Loving Canines



Guiding Light: Guide Dog Brightens Veteran's Daily Life

"Which is more important: your heart or your vision?"

That was the question the retina specialist asked Fred Larimer, a retired software consultant and veteran. He had been having problems with his sight, and the culprit seemed to be the betablocker for his arrhythmia, which was reducing blood flow to his optic nerve.

For Fred, it was a reckoning.

"I realized if indeed I'm gonna go blind, then I need to figure out how I can continue to live in a world unsighted."

Enter golden retriever Essex. Fred knew from that first meeting this would be a special relationship.

"He and I had a few moments together. I know he's about two and a half years old, and he's beautiful.

"I now have a sense of purpose," Fred said. It's given me the freedom and confidence to do things that I didn't think I could do. But having Essex with me, it's like 'Okay, buddy, let's go do an adventure!'"

Fred has discovered that Essex has so much more to give than just guidance.

"He is my companion. He raises my energy, and he is so happy, so congenial, so friendly, that I find my attitude has become more positive as a result of having him here with me. He's not just a guide dog, but he's also a comfort dog and a support dog."

Now the only question Fred has to wrestle with is where he and Essex will go next. 🐾

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT & DIRECTOR, TONY BLEVINS

As we enter this season of giving, I'm reminded of how hope begins — with one simple act of kindness that can change a life.

At Guide Dogs of America | Tender Loving Canines, we see that hope every day. It's a veteran finding peace beside a loyal service dog. A child with autism gaining confidence. A person who is blind or visually impaired stepping forward with independence.

Our Holidays of Hope campaign celebrates these life-changing partnerships and the people who make them possible. This season, we'll share stories of courage and connection — from Fred & Essex, Anthony & Marley, and Jade & Stella to staff, volunteers and puppy raisers who help turn hope into reality.

Each story is a reminder that hope grows when we come together. I invite you to be part of it.

Give the gift of hope today. Your support creates brighter futures for those who need it most.

With gratitude,

Tony Blevins

Tony Blevins
President / Director
GDA | TLC



Autism Service Dog Lives Up to Her Promise



"We found it really hard to go out and do errands or travel or attend events, things like that," Jade Duke, mother of 7-year-old twins and a 3-year-old, and proud wife of a disabled veteran.

"Evie has outbursts in public, and it's hard to get her back to being regulated. She runs away (from us) or darts into traffic. One of us would stay home with the kids, and one of us would go out, which was also difficult."

That was until Stella, a puppy raised by the Sjogren Family, became Evie's service dog.

"Because Stella has a handle, it's a lot easier for us to go out in public because Evie is focused on holding onto the handle and watching Stella walk in the store. So it keeps her focused on Stella rather than on everything going on around her which might overwhelm her."

As Stella's handler, Jade got background on the famous pup while doing 10 days of training. "I heard everyone loved her." So she was thrilled when Holly Sjogren reached out about a visit.

"We were able to meet them up in Tacoma. They met our entire family, and it was very full circle. It was super cool."

Stella has proven herself to be an invaluable member of the family.

The one surprise Jade had with Stella was just how smart she is.

"Having Stella has given us hope for the future. So being able to travel more and have that security blanket of Stella and Evie holding onto her handle. It's peace of mind and the ability to do things we couldn't before."

That's something Jade, who has a background in social work, wants for everyone. 🐾



Veteran Service Dog Brings Calm Among Chaos

After serving in the U.S. Army, Anthony came home to face a battle that couldn't be seen. Sleepless nights and constant anxiety made everyday moments feel overwhelming...until he met Marley. With his GDA|TLC service dog by his side, Anthony found calm, confidence, and independence once again.

You can honor heroes like Anthony by giving the gift of hope, healing, and independence to veterans in need of a service dog. 🐾

THE YEAR'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

21

Guide Dogs

10

Veteran Service Dogs

21

Autism Service Dogs

6

Facility Dogs

300

Volunteers

200

Puppy Raisers

300

Active Graduates

6,000

Donors

LEARNING TO HEAL:

Patrol Chaplain Brings Hope on Four Paws

The tragedy hit hard: three members of a bomb squad were killed when a grenade they were transporting in the central training center detonated.

Patrol Chaplain for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Phil Reeves and his facility dog, Darcy, stayed at headquarters for two days to provide much-needed support.

Phil said, "There was a crime scene tech – they have a really tough job processing these terrible scenes – who came into this room and said, 'I heard there was a dog in here!' She got on the floor with Darcy and kinda curled up with her in the fetal position. Pretty remarkable to have a moment to decompress with this dog."

It was familiar to a retired police sergeant who knows how difficult the job can be.

"Anyone who serves in law enforcement has experienced some kind of post-traumatic stress. It tends to take a bite out of your soul at some level."

That was the case at a recent incident involving children.

"A few months ago, we had a group of kids attending a summer camp here in our jurisdiction, and a tree out of the blue fell on them and killed an eight-year-old boy. We were asked to go up there and accompany the deputies. Incidents with kids are tougher for them."

As always Darcy came through.

"She was up there with them and the families and staff at the park and was later involved in the debriefing. She just has an ability to understand when someone is in the throes of it and pays attention to them."

That mission started from day one.

"I had to leave the graduate ceremony early to come down to our emergency center to help folks going through the fires in the Palisades."

These days, Phil doesn't mind being what he calls "Darcy's Plus One." When he puts on her police vest – with badge! – and her service dog vest, Darcy is ready to work.

"Darcy helps just by her presence," Phil said. "Her natural temperament is just perfect for supporting people going through suffering and grieving." 🐾





EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT:

Raising Spirits: Breeding Manager Finds Hope

It began with horses. That's what Breeding Manager Natalie Ergler studied in school, but eventually she moved over to dogs.

She has never looked back.

Breeding guide and service dogs is more complicated than most people think.

Because of the specific qualities such dogs require, Natalie can't just get them from shelters.

"When you pull a dog from a shelter, you don't know the history – where they're coming from or how they were brought up. We're constantly checking in on our puppies. We have all that data on those breeding dogs, and we have seen that dog grow up."

The culmination of those efforts is the graduation ceremony.

"Seeing those dogs up there with their new partners, that's a heart-tugger for me. I feel like all of these dogs are mine because I've brought them into this world. In the end, the feeling Natalie experiences a lot... is hope.

"It goes back again to those dogs on that stage. I originally got into animals for animals. But seeing the people we help and the dogs that help them keeps me going and gives me hope." 🐾



OUR 2025 HOLIDAY CARDS ARE OFFICIALLY HERE!

Featuring original artwork lovingly created for GDA | TLC by long-time Puppy Raiser Monique Newman, these custom-designed cards were printed in a limited quantity to make each one feel truly special.

We invite you to order your set before this limited collection is gone. Visit our Store at guidedogsofamerica.org/giftshop



THANK YOU FOR MAKING OUR 44TH ANNUAL WILLIAM W. WINPINSINGER CHARITY EVENT A SUCCESS

Our 44th Annual William W. Winpingsinger Charity Event was a wonderful success, thanks to the generosity of our donors, the steadfast support of the IAM, and the dedication of our sponsors, attendees, and volunteers.

This cherished tradition once again brought our community together in the spirit of giving and in honor of William W. Winpingsinger's legacy. Your contributions – whether made in person or from afar – helped raise vital funds that directly support our guide and service dog programs. 🐾

Holidays of Hope

GIVE THE GIFT OF HOPE

To paraphrase Emily Dickinson, hope is the thing with fur – especially for anyone who has ever partnered with a service or guide dog.

And when you donate to Guide Dogs of America | Tender Loving Canines, you bring hope to even more potential partners.

Please consider supporting our Holidays of Hope campaign so we can continue to help and inspire individuals across the country.

[Every dollar you donate up to \$120,000 will be matched by The Jane Huey Family Foundation from Giving Tuesday (12/2) through the end of the year.]

SPONSORSHIP EXAMPLES



Student sponsorship for duration of training period on campus
\$1,000



Dog sponsorship for on-campus program training
\$500



Puppy sponsorship for time they are with raisers
\$300



Health care for newborn puppies
\$100



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT:

Raising Spirits: The Beauty of Volunteering

Who is the heart of GDA | TLC: the people or the dogs?

For Dana Custer, that's a tough question.

"Everybody there is so nice," Dana said. "Of course, it's fun seeing the dogs, especially the little puppies. It's a nice place to volunteer."

Dana began driving for the veterinary department last November then moved over to assisting maintenance in January.

He has learned a lot in the last year, including something he didn't expect.



"When I started driving, I didn't know anything about the campus. Doing maintenance, you need to know the whole area and everyone who works there so you can take care of the stuff. What's surprising is how big it is."

A dog lover, Dana has also gleaned a few tips from the trainers to use with his rescue: a chihuahua-miniature-pincher mix named Dusty.

"Watching what they do with the dogs has kind of helped me take care of Dusty."

But when you come right down to it, what's most special about this place isn't the dogs or the people but what they create together.

It's that connection between the people, the dogs and the community that matters most. And why when Dana is away from the team, he can't wait to return.

"I try and do everything I can to help. So, yeah, I feel a small part of that mission. I don't get to train the dogs or train the people but just helping around the campus, I consider that aiding in what they're doing." 🐾



Guide Dogs of America

Tender Loving Canines

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

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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 mail in your check. If paying by check, please make check payable to **Guide Dogs of America**.

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