

GUIDE DOG NEWS

2021
ISSUE 1



ZACK THIBODEAU
AND NAMATH



Guide Dogs
for the Blind



Guide Dogs for the Blind

A NON-PROFIT,
CHARITABLE
ORGANIZATION

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On occasion, GDB will share donor information with like-minded non-profit organizations to better fulfill our mission. If you do not want your information shared, please email us at donations@guidedogs.com.



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this newsletter!

GREETINGS FROM THE CEO

Greetings,

As we welcome a new year at Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB), we are reminded of how much we can accomplish when we all work together.

The phrase “*go further, go together*” sums up our amazing community of donors, volunteers, staff, and alumni who combine efforts to fulfill our mission every day, even in challenging times. **I’d like to recognize the Hind Foundation and the Hind family for their tremendous support over the years and especially this past year.**

When our training expenses grew due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the family and Foundation stepped forward with a \$1 million gift to help fund in-home training efforts. This provided GDB with the funding to serve more individuals despite the challenges of COVID!



**CHRIS BENNINGER
AND THEIA**

As we *go further* and *go together*, we are driven by the common belief that everyone should be able to live the life they want to live. Our passionate community leads the way in developing best practices to prepare dogs and clients for the guide dog lifestyle. And we advocate for the policy reforms that change how the world views blindness and disability. Because when everyone is empowered to participate, our communities are stronger.

Thank you for your continued encouragement and support. Together, we will *go further*. Together, we are *unstoppable*!

With gratitude,


Christine Benninger
President and CEO

SAVE THE DATE!
**GANINE HEROES
VIRTUAL GALA**

June 6,
2021

Details at
guidedogs.com





GUIDE DOG MOBILITY INSTRUCTORS: MUST LOVE DOGS AND PEOPLE

Becoming a qualified Guide Dog Mobility Instructor (GDMI) requires a unique set of skills. Instructors must not only be highly accomplished at training guide dogs, but also possess exceptional people skills to teach clients who are blind or visually impaired how to partner with a guide dog.

“Training dogs to become guides is an extremely complex skill, and yet there’s so much more involved to create partnerships, the true heart of our mission. The art in this profession is really about working with people,” says Apprentice Program Manager Amy Gunn.

Megan Dodder recently completed GDB’s three-year apprentice program where she learned how to effectively train guide dogs and design personalized client training plans. The keys she says are getting to know each client’s specific desires and needs,

and then creating a customized educational experience that takes their abilities and learning styles into consideration.

Megan reflected on working with a client who was learning to work with a successor guide dog.

“After meeting and talking with this client, I was able to curate an experience to support her specific learning style and desired levels of independence within the class program.”

One technique Megan employed was to prioritize what she calls ‘intentional silence,’ which means that Megan kept her verbal feedback to a minimum.

“We agreed upon different short phrases I could use when coaching to reduce my dialogue, and the client would ask me if she wanted additional assistance.” When the client was working on left turns, they agreed

that Megan would say ‘footwork’ if the client needed a reminder. Another prompt might simply be ‘head up’ to address posture and increase stability on slopes.

Why is concise coaching so important? Listening to auditory cues (such as traffic) is a primary means of staying oriented in the environment and determining when to cross streets, so minimizing extraneous sounds (like talking) allows a client to attend to this information. Silence from the instructor also allows the client more mental concentration for other tasks, such as attuning to their dog’s movements, monitoring their dog’s behavior, and reinforcing good work.

Megan also employed a teaching style to promote critical thinking and self-discovery by asking questions. “For example, if a client becomes disoriented along a route, I might ask ‘What direction are you facing?’ or ‘Which street did you last cross?’ I also might leave route directions more open ended. Instead of saying ‘Turn left toward the coffee shop,’ I’d say, ‘Turn toward the coffee shop.’ Lastly, being quiet when a client and their guide dog reach their destination respects the independent completion of the route.”



**GUIDE DOG MOBILITY INSTRUCTOR MEGAN DODDER
WITH TWO GUIDE DOGS IN TRAINING.**

Equipping clients with tools and techniques to customize their dogs’ work also leads to independence sooner. In class, clients learn how to teach their dogs to find a variety of useful targets such as pedestrian buttons, chairs, and doors to frequented destinations, resulting in less instructor input. These same skills can then be applied when traveling in their home communities.

Megan says one of the biggest lessons she learned during the apprenticeship was how to collaborate with clients and let them shape their educational experience within our comprehensive class training program. “I learned to meet my clients where they were so they can live the lives they want to live. That’s really what it’s all about.”

GUIDING WITH GOOD HEALTH

Veterinary Financial Assistance Program Covers Cost of Guide Dog's Surgery



ABOVE: MELISSA PADRON WITH HER GUIDE DOG, CAMEO. OPPOSITE PAGE: A FAMILY PHOTO WITH MELISSA, CAMEO, AND MELISSA'S TWO DAUGHTERS.

Melissa Padron still remembers the awful day she felt a small lump over the left eye of her beloved guide dog, *Cameo*. She rushed *Cameo* to her veterinarian, praying for a positive outcome. A biopsy revealed some good news: the mast cell tumor was non-cancerous. The bad news: the tumor needed to be removed before it grew any larger and the surgery would cost about \$1,700. “There was no way I could afford the cost of the surgery,” Melissa recalls. She immediately contacted Guide Dogs for the Blind to see how we could help. Our veterinarians reviewed *Cameo’s* records and recommended she see a specialist for the surgery. All medical costs would be covered by GDB’s Veterinary Financial Assistance program. Melissa breathed a sigh of relief.

“I’m just so grateful that Guide Dogs for the Blind was able to cover her surgery costs. Their financial assistance program and ongoing support to graduates ensures that we can keep our guide dogs happy and healthy.”

Three weeks later, *Cameo* resumed her guide dog duties. “Thank you, Guide Dogs for the Blind, for giving me the chance to keep *Cameo* and keep up with her care. My life would have been lost without her and I would not be the confident person that I am today without her.”

When she started the guide dog journey eight years ago, Melissa says she never could have imagined the bond she would

develop with *Cameo*. “This girl has given me freedom, confidence, dignity, and much more. Her companionship, loyalty, and sweet doggie snuggles are a couple others.”

Melissa says it’s remarkable how in tune *Cameo* is with her moods. “She knows when I’m stressed, nervous, unsure, or in pain. She’s comforted me through college finals, job interviews, tough decisions, adventures, major surgery, and two children. She’s been by my side through some of my most cherished memories and major life milestones. I couldn’t ask for a better dog to guide me through life’s many hurdles and successes.”



After her children were born, Melissa says *Cameo* helped her maintain an active lifestyle in her community. “I never could have remained so involved without her.” Melissa pauses and recalls what it was like when she was first paired with *Cameo*. “I still remember the feeling I had when I first grabbed the harness handle and gave her the guide dog command ‘forward’. It felt like I was flying down the sidewalk. We were one. A team.”

HELP FUND CRITICAL CARE NEEDS

Donate today to help ensure the health and welfare of guide dogs like *Cameo* so they can continue their life-changing work as guides. Your donation will help us provide critically needed vet care for guide dogs in 2021. Thanks to an anonymous donor, all donations made by April 30, 2021 will be doubled up to \$100,000! That means your gift will go twice as far! Please use the attached envelope in this newsletter to mail your donation or donate online at guidedogs.com/newsgift.

▶ **\$50 = \$100** and helps pay for rabies vaccines

▶ **\$100 = \$200** and helps pay for veterinary examinations

▶ **\$250 = \$500** and goes toward annual wellness vaccinations

▶ **\$500 = \$1000** and assists with the cost of urgent care procedures



CEO CHRIS BENNINGER AND THEIA; EVENT HOST THERESA STERN AND HER GUIDE DOG, WILLS.

HOLIDAY CELEBRATION RAISES MORE THAN \$425,000!

Our first-ever Virtual Holiday Celebration was a huge success! More than 1,500 households throughout the U.S., Canada, England, and India attended the online festivities, which raised more than \$425,000 for our programs!

A big thank you to Guide Dogs for the Blind **client Zachary “Zack” Thibodeau** for his eloquent speech about his guide dog *Namath*. Special thanks to **actor Noah Wyle** for making a brief appearance and narrating one of our videos during the event. Thanks also to the **David and Leah Robinson Fund** and the **ROMA Foundation** for their incentivizing matching gifts, our individual donors, and amazing sponsors for their incredible support. To view the event, visit [guidedogs.com/celebration2020](https://www.guidedogs.com/celebration2020).

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Zachary “Zack” Thibodeau was 8 years old when he first started going blind. His mother Johanna contacted Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) to see how we could help. Zack was too young for a guide dog, but the perfect age for our K9 Buddy program, which matches children and young adults with special dogs to be their companions. His K9 Buddy *Natura* changed his world.

“From the moment I met her, she calmed my fears, helped me build my confidence and made me realize that I wanted a guide dog of my own,” says Zack.

A few years later, Zack attended Camp GDB, a weeklong summer camp that gives teens ages 14 to 17 the opportunity to meet other teens who are blind or visually impaired. In addition to participating in fun activities like bicycling, hiking, and kayaking, teens explore the companionship, independence, and responsibility of having a guide dog. Zack’s summers at Camp GDB further solidified his goal to get a guide dog.

In late 2019, Zack’s dream came true when he was paired with *Namath*, a black Labrador Retriever. Now age 18, Zack and *Namath* have been a guide dog team for a year. Zack recently spoke at our Virtual Holiday Celebration about how thankful he is for *Namath* and their life-changing partnership.

“*Namath* is amazing. He makes me so happy and he’s so playful. But most importantly, he is a trustworthy companion that I can rely upon. I’m so grateful to have a guide dog of my own and I want more people to have this partner, this friend, this trusted ally.”

As he completes his senior year in high school, Zack is excited to begin his next adventure: attending Yale to pursue a career in public policy. *Namath* is a big factor in how confident he feels.

Johanna has noticed a big difference in Zack since he got *Namath*. “Zack is much more confident and sociable with *Namath* by his side.” Zack agrees that *Namath* has changed how he interacts with others. “He’s definitely helped me be more compassionate and empathetic towards others. He’s given me a lot of skills that I can apply toward my interactions with others. I think he has made me a better person.”





JEN AND
CLIPPER

ODE TO CLIPPER

By Jen Ferris, GDB Client

I was 32 years old when I was matched with *Clipper*. He gave me an added sense of freedom and independence, along with unconditional love and loyalty that I never could have imagined. He accompanied me through so many changes in our ten years together.

When I was in the thralls of my master's degree, there were moments when I could not comprehend any more information or write a coherent sentence. *Clipper* and I would head out for a walk and when we returned home, I was renewed and invigorated. This is how we carried on until I completed my degree.

During a pivotal moment after my Braille notetaker was stolen, *Clipper* taught me about courage, compassion, and empathy. I did not have the financial means to replace it, so we hit the streets to get it back. Armed with cigarettes, coffee, sandwiches, and a picture of the notetaker, *Clipper* and I met with people who were homeless and down on their luck. I informed them that the Braille notetaker had zero street value but was priceless to me. A week later, it was returned intact to a restaurant. Prior to *Clipper*, I was fearful, and judgmental of this population. With *Clipper* by my side, I felt safe, protected, and free to exercise my options to recover my notebook. I vowed then and there I would never be without a guide dog in my life.

In 2014, I retired *Clipper* with a couple who worshipped him until he was laid to rest in 2020. This fine boy led a good and noble life full of work, play, health, and vitality. I am grateful that he was loved and adored every day of his 14 1/2 years on this earth. *Clipper* set the bar for intelligence and dedication to his work. I applied these standards and expectations to my current guide dog, *Victoria*, who is equally sweet, loving, and intelligent. Thank you, GDB for the unrepayable gift of *Clipper* in my life. I will never forget what he has done for me.

PLANES FOR PUPPIES

When GDB needed help finding transportation for guide dog puppies, Angel Flight West (AFW) answered the call. With more than 1,500 volunteer pilots across the 12 Western states, they arrange free flights for people who have non-emergency medical needs but require air transportation to access care. During the pandemic, they have pivoted to include service animal transportation, among other things. Recently, a generous AFW pilot transported

five future canine heroes to GDB puppy raisers in New Mexico. Thank you, Angel Flight West, for your support of our mission! Pictured: GDB's CCP Operations and Project Manager Sarah Blevins.



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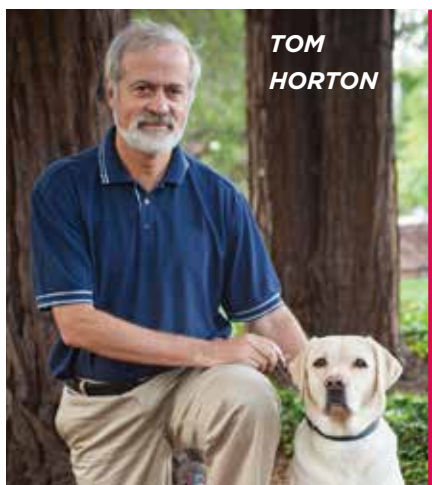
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Learn about estate planning options that could help GDB and your heirs at the same time! Featuring GDB's International Director of Planned Gifts, Thomas F. Horton, Esq. There is no cost to register.

Thursday, March 31, 2021 | Noon PT/1PM MT/2 PM CT/3PM ET

Learn more and register at [guidedogs.com/plan](https://www.guidedogs.com/plan)

For more information about including Guide Dogs for the Blind in your estate plans, please return the coupon below or call our estate planning team at 800.295.4050 ext. 4073 (Joan) or ext. 4169 (Tom).



GDB CHARITABLE ESTATE PLANNING

- I have already included Guide Dogs for the Blind in my estate plan. I accept the invitation to be recognized as a member of the Legacy Society.
- Please send me suggested language to use in my will or trust.
- I would like to receive information about charitable gift annuities.

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