

# GUIDE DOG NEWS

2021  
ISSUE 3



THE DEVITA FAMILY, VOLUNTEER BREEDER DOG  
CUSTODIANS, WITH BREEDER DOG KATHLEEN



Guide Dogs  
for the Blind



# Guide Dogs for the Blind

A NON-PROFIT,  
CHARITABLE  
ORGANIZATION

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Guide Dogs for the Blind follows the guidelines recommended by the Council of U.S. Dog Guide Schools and the International Guide Dog Federation for the humane care and training of our dogs, and the instruction and services offered to our clients.

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this newsletter!

# GREETINGS FROM THE CEO

Greetings,

September 30th marks the beginning of Fall and the completion of GDB's first quarter in fiscal year 2022. One of our top FY22 initiatives calls for serving our constituents more broadly by building on and off ramps to the guide dog lifestyle. We'll focus our efforts on training more clients to gain critical orientation and mobility skills, so more people will qualify for a guide dog; expand our programs for youth; develop new programs for seniors when a guide dog is no longer the best solution for their mobility, and of course, graduate more guide dog teams!

As we seek to support our constituents with a broader range of services that meet people's individual needs more holistically throughout their lives, innovation will remain a key focus. With your support during the pandemic, we focused on new and innovative ways to deliver our mission, such as embracing technology to adjust to a virtual environment across the organization. As we move forward, we will incorporate many of these innovative practices into our programs that help meet our clients' diverse needs.



We will also continue to serve as an innovative global leader and partner to enhance services for our constituents, and leverage opportunities for public policy and education to create a more inclusive society for individuals with visual impairments. This means advocating for policies and programs that protect people with guide dogs and increase access, equity, and support. Because when everyone is empowered to participate, our communities are stronger.

We believe that everyone should be able to live the life they want to live. Your support helps our clients achieve their dreams. Thank you for all you do!

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christine".

Christine Benninger  
President and CEO



## **BREEDING THE WORLD'S BEST GUIDE DOGS**

Our world-class breeding program blends art and science to usher in the future generations of our canine heroes. As the largest guide dog school in North America, there are approximately 800 puppies born every year in our state-of-the-art Puppy Center on our California campus.

Jenna Bullis, director of breeding, canine care and development (*above*), is not only proud of her team's ongoing commitment to care for our breeder dogs and puppies, but for its ability to pivot when breeding was paused during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. "We use GDB's long-term organizational goals to inform our breeding decisions. It takes nearly two years for today's puppies to become guides, so we are always planning for the future. When the pandemic hit, we were in the process of moving into the new Puppy Center. Many of our female breeder dogs were already expecting puppies, and we had to see those litters through."

GDB's breeding program began in the late 1940s to help ensure a consistent production of dogs with desirable traits. The breeds in our program include Golden Retrievers, yellow and black Labrador Retrievers, and a cross between the two (Lab/Golden crosses). Jenna makes certain that GDB not only employs the highest standards of responsible breeding practices, but takes into account our clients' needs and preferences as well.

To ensure they are making the best breeding matches possible, Jenna's team considers everything from success rates and litter size to conception rates and lineage. When it comes to client preferences, everything from dog size to coat color can come into play. For example, Jenna says a yellow dog may be easier to see for clients who have some functional vision, or a black dog might be ideal for individuals who wear dark business attire.

“The breeding department also works closely with our client services team, guide dog mobility instructors, community field representatives, puppy raisers, and veterinarians to assess the temperament and health of pups in the field,” says Jenna. “Our dogs typically have fewer health issues than the general population of the breeds we use, and we work with the scientific community to stay current on the latest genetic research to continue to improve the health, longevity, and temperamental traits of our dogs.” Jenna says a dog’s success as a guide is rarely determined by one, or even a few, specific traits. “It’s a combination of attributes—including a love of guiding—and an absence of faults that contribute to the success of our dogs.”

About 180 dogs are in GDB’s breeder program at any given time and live with volunteer families who reside within 50 miles of the California campus. “These amazing dogs live rich, happy lives as family pets,” explains Jenna.

The DeVita Family of Novato, Calif. loves caring for GDB breeder dog *Kathleen*, a female black Lab. “The entire experience has been so gratifying for our entire family,” says

Brittany DeVita, who raved about the amazing veterinary care *Kathleen* received after she delivered two litters. “The care and support of the dogs is just amazing.”

Breeder custodial families must complete an application and interview, attend a dog management class, undergo a home visit, and bring the breeder dog to our campus for

wellness checks, and as needed for breeding. For females, when it is time to give birth, the dogs are checked into our Puppy Center five days in advance and enjoy 24-hour pampering and care by our professional staff for the duration of their stay. Our highly skilled neonatal and veterinary teams oversee all aspects of physical, emotional, and developmental health of our moms and litters until puppies are placed with a puppy raising family. A mama dog will stay in the Puppy Center for approximately seven weeks until her puppies have been weaned. Staff and volunteers continue to provide critical developmental experiences for



the puppies until they are placed with puppy raising families at 8-9 weeks of age.

Brittany says knowing that *Kathleen’s* puppies could become guide dogs or K9 Buddies is extremely satisfying. “It’s nice to know we’re part of a larger community that is working to make a real difference for people who are blind or visually impaired.”

# COOL IN SCHOOL!

The fall semester is underway for college students across the country, and freshman Ethan Edwards is thrilled to experience campus life at Illinois State with his guide dog *Ginsburg*. The 18-year-old journalism major says he particularly enjoys the added mobility and confidence he feels with *Ginsburg* by his side. “I learned to be self-reliant with a cane, but having a guide dog gives me that extra confidence and peace of mind when navigating my way through campus,” says Ethan.

Ethan says *Ginsburg* also makes it much easier to meet people. “Guide dogs really are a social bridge. Everyone wants to talk with you when you’re walking with an adorable yellow Lab. I’m eager to take on every opportunity to talk with people, educate them about guide dogs, make new friends, or whatever the situation entails.”

Ethan always knew he wanted a guide dog, but it wasn’t until he attended Camp GDB and experienced what it was like to walk with a guide dog and care for a guide dog that he was hooked. “Camp definitely cemented my decision.” Now as he spends more time navigating new routes with *Ginsburg*, Ethan wants to thank GDB for matching him with such an awesome dog. “It’s like we have a telepathic bond. *Ginsburg* knows how to help me, and I understand what he’s trying to communicate.”

Ethan and *Ginsburg*, along with so many other GDB clients, aren’t the only ones back in the classroom this fall. Many of our guide dog puppies also spend time in school settings thanks to our volunteer puppy raisers who may work as teachers, administrators, or are students themselves. Exposure to classrooms and campus environments are excellent socialization experiences for the pups on their journeys toward becoming guide dogs.

Lora Harrison is a GDB volunteer puppy raiser and puppy club leader. Lora helps the puppies she raises experience new situations by bringing them to the elementary school where she



ETHAN AND  
GINSBURG

works as a librarian. She says it's always fun for the kids to see puppies go from bouncing preschoolers to well-behaved adolescents. Even though she's been a volunteer for eight years, Lora says she's still amazed by what it takes to raise a guide dog. "It definitely 'takes a village,'" she laughs. "From the expert care at GDB's Puppy Center to the nurturing care from puppy raisers and skilled guide dog instructors, everyone works together to make it all happen. I'm still in awe of the entire process."

Lora says the feedback and stories she hears from clients who have teamed up with the dogs she has raised are so heartwarming. "One GDB graduate told me his guide dog saved him from stepping in front of an electric car that he didn't hear coming. His dog 'disobeyed' his command to go forward. Then the client said he felt the car drive by him and realized what his dog did to prevent him from walking in front of a car. Stories like that just blow me away."



LORA HARRISON



## HELP WITH OUR 2021 BACK-TO-SCHOOL SUPPLY DRIVE!

Donate today to help ensure that our clients have everything they need to learn virtually, in their own homes, or at one of our campuses. All services are provided free of charge and GDB receives no government funding. We are 100% funded by generous donors like you.

- ▶ **\$25** helps pay for a food bowl and fleece pad for a guide dog
- ▶ **\$50** helps pay for a leash and grooming supplies for a guide dog
- ▶ **\$100** goes toward transportation for one puppy to either our CA or OR campus for guide dog training
- ▶ **\$250** assists with the costs of a "Puppy Raising Kit" for a volunteer puppy raiser
- ▶ **\$500** helps provide transportation for one client to and from one of our campuses
- ▶ **\$1,000** helps provide transportation for ten puppies to either our CA or OR campus for guide dog training

It's never easy saying goodbye to a guide dog that has retired or passed. Just ask Joan Robinson, whose retired guide dog, *Tallulah*, passed away in December 2020.

Their remarkable partnership began on our Oregon campus in April 2010. In eight and a half years, Joan and *Tallulah* had many adventures together, including 20 trips to Europe to attend choral experiences and music festivals. *Tallulah* was such a world traveler; she had her own European Union Pet Passport and became known as the 'Mozarthund' in Austria because she attended so many concerts and operas.

"She transformed my life, but she transformed other people's lives as well," remarks Joan. "She opened up their eyes to how important a guide dog can be. She truly was an ambassador for the guide dog lifestyle." Joan, who lives in Toronto, Ontario, used a white cane for 40 years. It wasn't until she retired from her job as a librarian that she decided to get a guide dog. "*Tallulah* literally freed me to travel."

During their first tour to Paris with friends, *Tallulah* guided Joan through narrow, crowded streets, and around posts meant to restrict parking on the sidewalk. "*Tallulah* was incredibly adventurous, sassy, and bold. It didn't faze her at all," explains Joan.

On another trip to Venice, *Tallulah* negotiated bridges over the canals as if she had been doing it all her life. They were on and off the vaporetto (a Venetian public waterbus), in a gondola, and in and out of historic locations. "*Tallulah* gave me the courage to explore and discover and dream of the next destination," says Joan.

When *Tallulah* retired, Joan threw her a retirement party. Forty-five people who Joan had met attending concerts, classes, and trips attended. "They had all fallen in love with her and wanted to celebrate the fact that she had been an important part of our lives."



## ***World Traveler and Lifelong Companion***



To find the perfect retirement home for *Tallulah*, Joan sought advice from Chuck Farrugia, a GDB field service manager. “He told me to try and create continuity for *Tallulah*. Music had been one of those things that was ever present in our lives, and I wanted to make sure she could still enjoy that.”

In early October 2018, *Tallulah* became part of the Harris Family—Lucas, Geneviève, and their young daughter, Daphnée—musicians whom Joan had met and seen perform many times in Toronto. For over two years with her new family,

*Tallulah* enjoyed being a lady of leisure and joined Geneviève for violin practice every morning.

When *Tallulah* passed away, her extended family of Lucas, Geneviève, Daphnée, and Joan were there to comfort her on her way. “She was intelligent, loving, and adventurous,” says Joan. “I feel so fortunate to have had *Tallulah* in my life. She brought so much joy to us all.” Today, Joan shares her life with *Forester*, her guide dog since 2018. He has been a great source of comfort to Joan throughout the pandemic. “I’m so grateful to have him in my life.”



# CANINE HEROES VIRTUAL GALA



Our **CANINE HEROES VIRTUAL GALA** in June drew more than 750 attendees and raised more than \$350,000 for our guide dog programs! Special thanks to James Newton Howard for narrating our videos during the event depicting the many heroes (canine and human) who comprise our GDB community: guide dog team heroes, K9 Buddy heroes, veterinary heroes, puppy raising heroes, and sponsor heroes. Thanks also to **Granite Solutions Groupe** and an anonymous donor for their matching gifts, our individual donors, and amazing sponsors for their incredible support.

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## SAVE THE DATE *in hope that we can gather together in person*

- **HOLIDAY LUNCHEON** December 3, 2021 (San Francisco)
- **80TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION AND CANINE HEROES GALA** April 9, 2022 (San Francisco)
- **POSTPONED: CAPS & TAILS** September 11, 2021 (Portland, OR) — *please check online for updates*

For more information, visit [guidedogs.com/events](https://www.guidedogs.com/events)

## THANK YOU TO OUR NEW & CONTINUED SUPPORTERS April 1-June 30, 2021

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### Recognizing the vision of those who have included GDB in their estate plans.

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## LEAVING A LEGACY



**Our graduates count on us to make sure they can continue to enjoy the rewards of partnership with a guide dog throughout their lives. You can ensure we fulfill that commitment through your investment in our future. Our Legacy Society honors supporters who make provisions for GDB in their estate plans.**

“My guide dogs, *Freida*, *Angela*, and now *Buddy*, have been the next best thing to having my sight back. Jim and I (*left*) are so very grateful and want to ensure that others can have this life-changing experience! We are enthusiastically including GDB in our estate planning.” —*Vickie Kennedy*

For more information, please return the coupon below, or call our estate planning team at 800.295.4050 ext. 4073 (Joan) or ext. 4169 (Tom).



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- Please send me suggested language to use in my will or trust.
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**Return to:**

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Guide Dogs for the Blind  
P.O. Box 151200  
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