

# GUIDE DOG NEWS

The Quarterly Publication of  
Guide Dogs for the Blind

2016 ISSUE 1

*MATTHEW EASTON  
AND CHESTNUT*



## LEADING THE WAY

Learn all about how GDB trains our future guide dog mobility instructors in this article that highlights our apprentice training program. **p4**

## POSITIVE IMPACT

Read this profile honoring Director of Research and Development Michele Pouliot for her 42 years of service at GDB. **p8**

## DOGS WITH JOBS

Visit the “Career Change Corner” to learn about the incredible work that some of our career change dogs are doing with other service organizations. **p9**



**Guide Dogs  
for the Blind**

## A NON-PROFIT, CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION

800.295.4050  
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## IN MEMORIAM



Guide Dogs for the Blind lost a wonderful employee, volunteer, and friend with the sudden passing of Lee Shenk on January 9, 2016. Lee worked with GDB as a puppy truck driver for many years and was responsible for

delivering countless puppies to volunteer puppy raisers throughout the Western U.S. He made every delivery special, providing raisers with clues about puppies' names and sharing his smiles and kindness with all. He was also extremely compassionate with raisers, who were tearful as their puppies were recalled for training or joyful as retired guides or career-change dogs returned to their care. Lee also volunteered in our San Rafael vet clinic where he contributed to the care of puppies and guides and won the hearts of colleagues and clients alike. He will be greatly missed, but never forgotten; please keep his family in your thoughts and prayers.

*Many of you have asked how you can help. Guide Dogs for the Blind has created the Lee S. Shenk memorial fund with the blessing of Lee's wife, Deb. Donations to this fund will help us fulfill the mission that Lee cared so much about by helping support GDB programs such as puppy raising, transportation, training, graduate services, and veterinary care. If you are interested in donating to this fund, please visit: [guidedogs.com/LeeShenk](http://guidedogs.com/LeeShenk).*

# GREETINGS FROM THE CEO

Greetings,

Welcome to the first issue of Guide Dog News for 2016. When people ask me what is unique about GDB, I have so many things to share it's hard to know where to start and where to stop! I often mention our innovative training techniques, the lifetime of support we provide our clients, our wonderful dogs, and the amazing community of alums, staff, board, donors, and volunteers that help us fulfill our life-changing mission.

You'll see members from our community celebrated in different ways throughout this issue: profiles, alumni updates, a remembrance, photos from events, and a snapshot of some of our career

change dogs and their new exciting jobs. You'll also find a special feature thanking our donors. As you may know, GDB doesn't receive any government funding, so GDB's generous donors play a critical role by providing general contributions, grants, honor or memorial gifts, bequests, and more. We are so very grateful for the support of our many community members!

We hope you enjoy this issue and hope to see you all soon at a graduation, fundraising event, or puppy delivery!

Warm regards,



Christine Benninger  
President and CEO



# INSTRUCTING THE INSTRUCTORS

*GDB'S APPRENTICE PROGRAM PREPARES  
THE NEXT GENERATION OF GUIDE DOG  
MOBILITY INSTRUCTORS*



*APPRENTICE PROGRAM  
MANAGER AMY GUNN*

It's a refrain that we hear often at GDB: "What does it take to become a guide dog instructor?" It's a valid question for such a unique job. It's a position that combines training dogs with teaching people who are blind or visually impaired how to work with those dogs. It's an active job that necessitates being outside in every sort of weather, and it requires travel to assist or interview our clients in their home areas across the U.S. and Canada. The job calls for a comprehensive understanding of the causes of blindness, and a level of experience with orientation and mobility (O&M) techniques. In addition, it requires a mastery of dog handling and care. At times, it can be part counselor, part coach, a bit of a matchmaker, with a dose of dog behaviorist thrown in for good measure.

So how do our instructors obtain all of these skills? That's where our three-year guide dog mobility instructor (GDMI) apprentice program comes in.

"There is no college major, degree program, or certification course that can teach all

the skills required," said GDB's Apprentice Program Manager Amy Gunn. "All GDMIs learn on the job. It's a complex, physically and mentally demanding job that requires excellent critical thinking and problem solving skills. Relating well to both people and dogs is crucial, and having a sense of humor is always helpful. The apprentices bring such care and passion to their work!"

To gain hands-on experience, apprentices work in tandem with mentor GDMIs to learn the dog training and client education functions of their jobs. "This encompasses learning how to train young adult dogs to perform guidework tasks, and evaluating each dog's skills several times throughout the ten-week training cycle," Amy said.

"Apprentices also learn how to teach clients to work with their new dogs during our two-week residential program. This includes teaching basic dog care, management, and how to work in partnership with a dog as a mobility aid."

In addition, there is an academic component to the apprenticeship that includes

*AMY WORKING WITH  
APPRENTICE PALMER  
FITZHUGH ON CANE  
TRAVEL SKILLS.*



## NEW LICENSEE

Congratulations to Andrea Carmotta, GDB's newest licensed guide dog mobility instructor. Andrea is from Northern California where she grew up amid the activities and lifestyle of her family's dairy farms. She has a bachelor's degree in agribusiness and a minor in dairy science from Cal Poly State University, and managed one of the family farms



prior to coming to work at GDB. "I love getting to both train the dogs as well as work with our wonderful clients," she said. "My favorite part of the job is getting to see the teams graduating. It is wonderful to see how well they do and all that hard work paying off and changing someone's life." Andrea and her husband live in Santa Rosa, and she enjoys hiking, snowboarding, gardening, and baking in her spare time.

required reading, workshops, and practical lessons that focus on topics such as O&M techniques, eye conditions, rehabilitation services, and more. The program ensures that apprentices have the skills to consistently provide high quality, safe training for our teams, as well as prepares them for the licensing test administered to apprentices on both of our campuses by the California State Board of Guide Dogs for the Blind.

Our current apprentices come from the fields of social work, vocational rehabilitation, the military, medical clinics, and non-profits, among others. They have experience with dogs in animal shelters, dog day care facilities, and veterinary clinics. Some have worked with a variety of other animals, including horses, elephants, dolphins, sea lions, and a wide assortment of exotic animals. Many were also GDB puppy raisers, and most have college degrees or certifications from animal training schools in subjects ranging from biology, psychology, and social work, to animal behavior, veterinary medicine, or exotic animal management.

"It's a very fulfilling job," Amy said. "For me, facilitating the relationships between clients and their guide dogs has been the most rewarding aspect of working at GDB, and I'm excited to share that experience with the next generation of GDMIs."



**GDB'S DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT MICHELE POULIOT**

GDB is the school of choice for so many of our clients thanks to the constant innovation and evolution of our programs. Many of our pioneering efforts have been spearheaded by our Director of Research and Development Michele Pouliot, and they have made her a trusted expert and a valued resource in the guide dog industry worldwide. Under her direction, for example, we've implemented the use of positive reinforcement techniques in our dog training, such as the use of Clicker

training and food rewards, among others. Michele is retiring after 42 years with GDB, and we are grateful for the numerous contributions to our programs that she leaves as her legacy.

Michele came to GDB from a background in horse training. After also dabbling in dog training and reading a magazine article about dogs guiding people who are blind or visually impaired, she was intrigued about the idea of using her animal training skills in a way that would also help people. She pursued a career with GDB, and came on board in 1974. After completing an apprenticeship, she then spent more than 20 years as a guide dog mobility instructor before taking on other supervisory and management roles in the Training Department. Michele was a core member of the GDB staff who opened our Oregon campus in 1995, and was also one of the first international assessors from GDB for the International Guide Dog Federation. Since 2001, her focus has been on helping advance a host of GDB programs, be they dog training, student instruction, canine welfare, or puppy raising.

"I've had the wonderful opportunity in this position to help promote and direct improvement in our organization," Michele said. "The best thing about my job is seeing all of the work that we've done to change our programs and actually make a better guide dog for our clients than we've ever done before. It's been a joyful, emotional career. It's so rewarding—each day I have opportunities to witness all of the great things we're doing. I've been fortunate in my job to have found what I love and be very passionate about it."

Susan Armstrong, GDB's Vice President of Training Operations on our Oregon campus, agrees. "Michele's work has allowed our programs to not only stay contemporary and relevant, but set the gold standard in our field as well," she said. "Through her work within GDB and her extensive work with other schools internationally, Michele's impact on our industry is nothing less than profound. We are so fortunate to have had her expertise and leadership as a part of our team."

# GRAD PROFILE

“Getting a guide dog is one of the best things that I have done for my independence and mobility,” said GDB grad Braden Dashney. “The speed and ease of my travel, combined with the renewed sense of self confidence, has been unparalleled in my life. Together, I feel that *Fonzie* and I can go anywhere, and take on any challenge that the world throws at us.”

Braden and yellow Lab *Fonzie* graduated from GDB in 2014. “When my instructor first brought *Fonzie* to meet me, it was love at first sight,” Braden said. “He was such a handsome, gentle animal. I felt the beginnings of a bond, that to this day, continues to grow and mature.”

Braden lives in Portland, Ore., with his partner Jessica, and their 6 year-old daughter, Violet. Braden was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa as a child, but worked in the construction and carpentry trades as an adult until his vision declined to the point that he sought out vocational rehabilitation training. During that training Braden met a fellow GDB grad who ran the wood shop. “Here was a person who was totally blind, used all the same woodworking tools as sighted people, and traveled independently,” Braden said. Thanks to that experience, Braden now has a small wood shop at home, is working toward growing a woodworking business, and learned about GDB. “So I went on a tour of GDB’s Oregon campus where I got to try traveling with a guide dog and knew that this was the mobility tool for me.”

Braden and *Fonzie*’s life together is one on the go. He is currently working on a major renovation of his home, is a member of a visually impaired dragon boat racing team, and enjoys travel and adventure. He recently went on a trip to Belize and Guatemala where he visited Mayan ruins, hiked through the jungle, and went snorkeling.



**BRADEN, FONZIE, AND  
“THE BRONZE FONZ”  
STATUE IN MILWAUKEE  
(DAUGHTER VIOLET IS  
BEHIND THE STATUE)**

“The instructors do a great job of matching people with dogs. *Fonzie* is all business when he is working,” Braden said. “He is quick, thoughtful, and determined, but out of harness, he’s kind of goofy! He will chase his tail occasionally, and loves to play with his toys. Work hard and play hard...I suppose we have a lot in common.”

Braden has really enjoyed becoming involved with GDB. “There is a real feeling of community in this organization, from the instructors, to my fellow graduates, to the puppy raisers,” he said. “Everyone is working toward the same goal, and I am proud and honored to be a part of that.”

It is the rare person who actually has her dream job, and Guide Dogs for the Blind board member Sigrid Button (Sig) is one of the lucky few. Sig is the Administrative Director for the Casey Eye Institute and notes, “I absolutely love working with brilliant scientists and amazing physicians who are working hard to eliminate preventable blindness in Oregon.” She adds being involved with Guide Dogs for the Blind complements her professional endeavors perfectly, “I love knowing we are making a meaningful difference in the lives of the blind. At Casey Eye Institute, we have 52 incredible doctors who have access to the best technologies and treatments—and we are not yet able to completely eliminate preventable blindness. It is very meaningful knowing that GDB’s dogs are available at no charge to patients who we cannot help.”

It is not surprising that Sig came to be part of Guide Dogs for the Blind, given her passion for helping the blindness community along with her life-long love of dogs. “Every dog in our lives has been special and provided our family with companionship and joy. We have had our current dog *Nate* for seven years—he is a career change yellow Lab from GDB. He goes to work with my husband Bob every day and has lots of ‘downtown Portland’ friends including parking attendants, hotel valets, and street vendors who give him daily treats...he thinks life with the Button family is pretty good!”



Sig also worked at GDB’s Oregon Campus for some time. This experience coupled with her current professional experience help inform her efforts as a board member. “I have first-hand knowledge of the organization and the amazing people who work there. I also am the administrative leader of an organization that has many similarities to GDB—about 400 employees with an annual budget of \$75 million. We rely heavily on fundraising, grants, and clinical revenues to support our operations...I hope this experience allows me to make meaningful contributions to GDB and GDB’s Board of Directors.”

While work consumes most of her time, Sig loves to spend time with her 16 month-old grandson, reading, time at the family’s home on the Oregon coast, and gardening. She likes to “throw in a little travel and photography as well.” GDB is very fortunate to be one of the recipients of her time and many talents!



# CAREER CHANGE CORNER

KEEPING UP WITH THE ADVENTURES  
OF GDB CAREER CHANGE DOGS



## DARWIN

*Darwin* was trained by Early Alert Canines in Concord, Calif., as a medical alert dog and then placed with a young girl named Laura who has Type 1 Diabetes. Laura's mom says, "As parents, he provides us peace of mind through his constant vigilance; he provides our daughter with unconditional love."  
[earlyalertcanines.org](http://earlyalertcanines.org)



## SHILOH

*Shiloh*, a Golden Retriever/Lab cross has a new role as the Chief Cheer Officer at the Ronald McDonald House in Dallas. *Shiloh* brightens the lives of sick children and their families living in the house while receiving care in nearby hospitals. [rmhdallas.org](http://rmhdallas.org)



## VALLEY

*Valley* is a certified hearing dog trained by Oregon Dogs for the Deaf and matched with a handler in Michigan. *Valley* alerts to sounds that are necessary for safety and independence such as doorbells, phones, smoke alarms, and more.  
[dogsforthedeaf.org](http://dogsforthedeaf.org)

# HAPPENINGS



## SAVE THE DATE

### PINOT & PUPS WINE AUCTION

Saturday, June 18, 2016 | Portland, OR

Visit [guidedogs.com/events](http://guidedogs.com/events)  
for more information.

## CANINE HEROES AUCTION

GDB's 39th annual Festive Holiday Luncheon was held in December in San Francisco. More than 600 people joined us to kick off the holiday season with a dose of puppy cheer. The program featured a moving keynote address by GDB grad Tom Kowalski with his guide dog *Dynamo*, remarks by puppy raisers Warren and Claudia Wish, and a new puppy delivery to two eager puppy raisers. More than \$131,000 was raised to support our programs. Many thank to our generous corporate sponsors: Guardians—Bon Air Center, Dodge & Cox, Granite Solutions Groupe. Benefactor—Louis Kaliski, Inc. Patrons—Chris Villa/Kiewit Infrastructure West Co., SanTen, Inc., Valero Benicia Refinery.

**RITA SCHAEFER  
WITH LILI,  
CHARLIE, AND  
MAGGIE ROCKET**



Rita Schaefer's introduction to guide dogs came in the form of a book that she read as a child. Rita never forgot how impressed she was with the devoted guide dog in the story, and of the the world that was opened up to the dog's handler as a result of their partnership. Then, as an adult, Rita's career as a rehabilitation counselor provided her the opportunity to interact with many guide dog teams over the years. "I was in awe of the dogs' incredible temperament, their exceptional training, and the degree of independence they provided to their handlers," she said. "So it was a natural progression for me to visit GDB's Oregon campus when I moved to Portland in 1994." She's been a supporter ever since.

"I have consistently been impressed with the friendly staff. I have met GDB instructors and appreciate how receptive they are to my questions," she said.

"I have also met numerous puppy raisers and learned about the great support they get while raising these wonderful, lovely puppies."

Rita currently has three yellow Labrador Retrievers of her own, two of which are certified therapy dogs. Together they make weekly therapy visits to Providence St. Vincent Medical Center in Portland.

Rita's philosophy in life is "to leave the world a better place than when I entered." With her commitment to GDB, we are grateful to be a recipient of her generosity. Thank you Rita!

## PRESIDENT'S CIRCLE DONORS

July 1, 2015-January 31, 2016

**Guide Dogs for the Blind's generous major donors who contribute \$5,000 or more annually are recognized through membership in our President's Circle. Their generosity allows us to continue to support our clients, our dogs, and our communities.**

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Honoring the generosity and vision of those who have chosen to include GDB in their estate plans.

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## GDB “TOUCHES OUR HEARTS”

“*Marsala* has brought me more freedom and confidence than I could have ever imagined. The fact that all of this is done with no financial burden to clients truly touched our hearts. That’s why my husband Matt and I decided to include GDB in our estate plan. Please join us in Guide Dogs for the Blind’s Legacy Society, I know they’ll be excited to welcome you. Thanks for everything you’ve done—and everything you’ll continue to do—to create life-changing partnerships for people like me!” —*GDB Alumna Amy Salger*



Learn more about our Legacy Society at [guidedogs.com/plannedgiving](https://www.guidedogs.com/plannedgiving).

### GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND 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 the *Planning Your Legacy* guide for preparing wills and trusts.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Return to Sue Dishart - Planned Giving Officer / Joan Scott - Planned Giving Coordinator  
Guide Dogs for the Blind, P.O. Box 151200, San Rafael, CA 94915-1200

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- **SEND A DONATION TODAY**  
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Direct your bank to automatically transfer your donation.
- **MAKE AN HONOR OR MEMORIAL GIFT**  
Pay tribute to a friend, relative, or pet; cards of celebration or sympathy will be sent in your name.
- **CREATE A LEGACY IN YOUR ESTATE**  
Name GDB in your will, trust, or as a beneficiary of your annuity, life insurance policy, IRA, or retirement plan. We honor such commitments with membership in our Legacy Society.
- **DESIGNATE YOUR GIFT**  
Designate your donation to go toward a specific GDB program. Contact us for more info.

Guide Dogs for the Blind will, on occasion, share donor information with like-minded non-profit organizations in an effort to better fulfill our mission and serve our clients. If you do not wish to have your information shared, please call our Development Department at 800.295.4050 extension 4160 or email us at [donations@guidedogs.com](mailto:donations@guidedogs.com).