

THE TRAINERS POINT OF VIEW

Kathryn Webster – Director of Training

It is a very exciting time when new dogs come back to the school. In just a matter of months, these new dogs will transform lives and become something very special. It is also very overwhelming, for both the trainer and the dog.

It's a new place and new faces. Initially, it's hard to remember who is who. Who has the deep-set eyes, the shorter legs, or the thicker coats? Who's the barker? Within a matter of days, their individual personalities begin to shine through. Even though we may have many dogs from one litter, each has a distinct personality.

When the dogs come back to the school, they return with pictures, toys, food and a puppy evaluation form. The form is very important because it tells us what the puppy likes, dislikes, fears and what we should expect when he encounters different environments. However, the form will stay tucked away in his file for a few weeks or maybe even a month because it is important, to us, that we get to know the new dogs without any preconceived ideas.

In the beginning, each dog has a 100% chance at becoming part of a successful guide dog team. As the evaluations and medical appointments come and go, we will resign ourselves to the fact that not all dogs are meant to be guide dogs. Although very important and well rewarded, it is a stressful job.

The environments they experienced, as a puppy-in-training, are the building blocks for what they will experience as a guide dog. In the beginning, their only responsibility was to be comfortable with new and different environments. Now, as a guide dog, they must shoulder the responsibility of a blind person's life. They don't just have to walk around the bus bench and under the tree, they now have to do it and watch out for the person holding onto the harness. This dog is asking himself, "Did he make it around the bus bench without hurting himself?" and "How low is the branch of this tree? Should I stop and show him the branch, try to go around it, or just walk under it?" What an incredible responsibility! How incredible that they have this ability. How incredible to be a part of this program.

After basic concepts have been taught and the dog is guiding in harness, I let myself relax and feel the freedom. I have total trust in this dog. I can only imagine what it must feel like to someone who has had to rely on a cane and cracks in the sidewalk to guide him to his destination. Moreover, I revel in the thought of how many lives this dog has touched and will continue to affect.

THIS PLACE IS GOING TO THE DOGS

Mindy Romero – Director Kennel Management

At the beginning of April, a new group of fantastic dogs arrived for training. Several were raised in the southern California area and three were raised in Washington state. Health checks are the first phase for these dogs then on to formal guide dog training.

The recent hot spell called for misters and some fun in the wading pool. Someday there may be big pools for the dogs, but for now, the kiddie pool works fine. Slowly but surely, this group of dogs have acclimated to kennel life. Obedience and good manners are a must and so far, they get a positive report card. The puppy raisers have done a fine job with these dogs and deserve a round of applause.



GRADUATE SERVICES

Mindy Romero

Currently, Guide Dogs of the Desert International, has 153 active graduates. With our new message board on the schools web site, we can have even more contact with our graduates. We look forward to a class in the fall and fulfilling our mission to serve the blind, the elderly blind and the blind with special needs.