

GUIDING PAWS NEWS

GuideDogs
OF THE Desert 
Spring 2020

Who Wants to be a Guide Dog

Training a Future Guide Dog

Read more on pg. 3

*“We’re so close
to making our
dreams become
a reality!”*

Read more on pg. 2

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GREETINGS FROM GUIDE DOGS OF THE DESERT



Ben Schirmer

Well, this is undoubtedly an interesting time for all of us! I have been working in the nonprofit arena for over 20 years. I’ve had to lead agencies through hurricanes (in Florida), 9/11, and the big crash in 2008. We all thought those were tough times, but this one is resetting the bar for what we consider difficult. These are REALLY challenging times for all of us.

Because we care for live animals, we could not close. We had to make many adjustments to how we work in order to protect the health and safety of our employees as well as the health and safety of our dogs and puppies. Like everyone, we created a “new normal” and are making the best of it. In an effort to create a safe workspace, we immediately closed our campus to all outside visitors. We installed hand sanitizer stations inside the front doors to each building. We also implemented a cleaning/disinfecting process for all work areas. Our lunchroom had to be closed for communal eating. Masks must be worn around campus unless we are sitting alone in our own office. We are doing everything we can to keep us all safe so we can ensure that Guide Dogs of the Desert can continue to meet its’ mission on the other side of this craziness.

Due to the financial slowdown (let’s face it, fundraising is not easy right now for any nonprofit), we have done what we can to eliminate all but the barest of essential expenditures. We are still maintaining the health and safety of our dogs, puppies, and staff, and as you know, we would never do anything that would negatively impact them.

We are fortunate; we have two essential things that help carry us through this challenging time:

First, our dogs and puppies make every day better for all of us.

Second, and just as important, we have all of you – our supporters, who make our work possible. I have to say, our supporters “Team GDD” have been awesome.

Despite the craziness going on in the world, you are still there and still doing what you can to help us remain true to our mission. All of us will be forever grateful for how you have rallied around us to help us!

The reality is, it all begins with you.

Ben Schirmer
Executive Director

GUIDE DOGS OF THE DESERT UPDATE NOW FOR SOME GOOD NEWS!

Puppies

As you have hopefully seen on Facebook or maybe Instagram – we have puppies!! Our breeding program was brought back to our campus at the end of 2018, so we now have the privilege of being part of the puppy process. We had Patty, a pregnant poodle, join us on campus in early March. Patty was joined shortly after by Alexa, a pregnant lab. They checked into our maternity suite, which happens to be, temporarily, our converted conference room in our Administration building.

Patty had nine poodle pups on April 4th, and Alexa gave birth to two lab pups a week later, on April 12th. So, we now have 11 incredible little ones with us on campus. All the puppies, as well as their mommas, are doing exceptionally well. Their eyes are open, their little tiny ears are up, and they are even up and walking around.

It is the most incredible process to watch. All of us at GDD are aware of what a privilege and honor it is to be part of this process. So now we all, including you, get to follow these pups on their journey to become a guide dog.

We look forward to sharing the journey with you!



Nursery

As you can imagine, using a converted conference room as our nursery is less than ideal. But, thanks to our generous donors, we are in the process of renovating what is currently a carport into a self-contained nursery. It has taken some time to get the architectural drawings done, but they have been submitted to the County so we can obtain our building permit. The COVID pandemic has undoubtedly slowed down pretty much everything, but I am happy to report that our permit request is moving along. We have several approvals and are just waiting for one last approval. This means that we should be able to break ground and get the construction started soon!

The nursery will give us a safe, secure, and self-contained space for our pregnant moms to have their puppies. Just like any newborn, they have no immune system when they are first born, so it is critical that we have a space free from germs or disease while they grow and build their immune systems.

We really need to thank our generous donors for their support and patience with this project. They dared us to dream that this was possible and have supported us along the way. It means a lot to us to have all of your support and encouragement.

We are so close to having this dream become a reality!

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US: SUSTAINER'S CLUB

Our Sustainer's Club members lend their support to GDD on a monthly basis. Dependable monthly income makes planning possible for both you and Guide Dogs of the Desert. The Sustainer's Club has been rather popular for our donors. ***We invite you to join The Club!***

Tail Waggers — For as little as \$10 per month, you will receive a photo of a puppy in training, along with a special Sustainer's Club pin.

Leader of the Pack — For \$30 or more per month, you will receive a post-it Post-It pad with the Sustainer's Club pin and photo. You will also receive our annual Guide Dogs of the Desert calendar.

Top Dog — With an increased monthly pledge of \$45 or more, in addition to the above recognition, you will receive an exclusive invitation to meet with students training at the campus.

FROM THE EYES OF A TRAINER

Michal Anna Padilla

Guide Dog Mobility Instructor/Orientation and Mobility Specialist

As I walk by Courtney's office, I stick my head in and smile as Maisy, one of our youngest puppies, slinks down into a crouch. Her hind end is in the air as her tail sticks straight up. She has a toy in her sights, and after a slight wiggle, she leaps into the air, landing with two feet on the target, sending it skittering to the other end of her playpen.

Smiling, I return to my office, where today's officemate is a small chocolate lab, Loki. She looks up as I walk in, but soon returns her head on her paws with a contented sigh. Most of the time, Loki is in constant motion. But right now, we are working on settling in the office, and after a fun play session followed by some guide work practice, Loki is all too eager to enjoy a mid-morning nap.

Looking at these two girls, on the surface, they don't look any different from your average house pet. But each of them has been bred and raised for a higher purpose. By the time they are three years old, they will be making life and death decisions regularly for an individual who has little or no sight.

BORN TO SERVE

The majority of Guide Dogs of the Desert puppies are bred with our lines or with a handful of carefully vetted breeders. Every dog that makes our program must not only have the temperament suitable to work for a person with a disability, but must also pass an extensive series of medical tests including genetic, orthopedic, cardiac and optometric.

Very young puppies receive Early Neurological Stimulation, which provides them with coping mechanisms, increases their confidence, and prepares them for a lifetime of learning. Volunteer raisers are then carefully selected for the best fit between puppy and home.

PREPARING THE PRODIGES

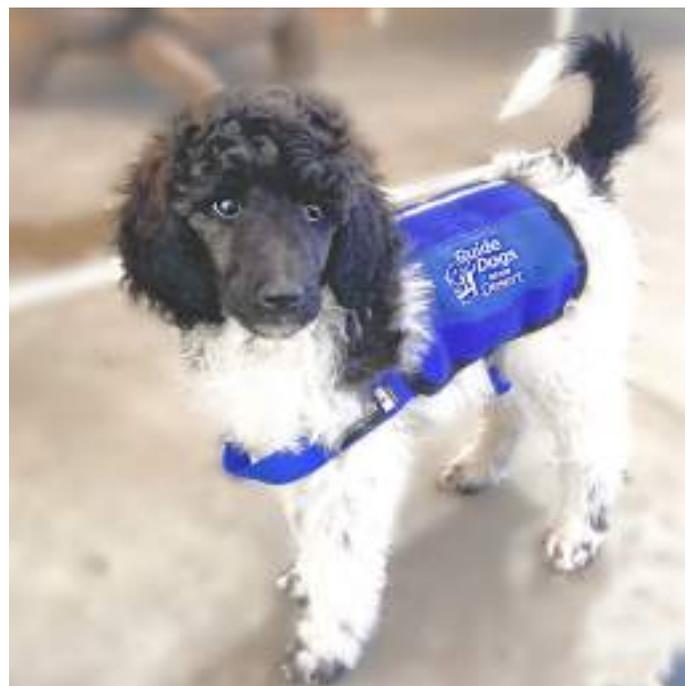
At eight weeks of age, the puppies go home with volunteer Puppy Raisers. Raisers spend the next year and a half teaching these puppies basic house manners, obedience and expose them to various environments.

Guide Dogs of the Desert has puppies living all over Southern California and Arizona in a variety of homes. They accompany these volunteers to the store, doctor's offices, restaurants, school, and work. All this time, the puppy is exposed to a variety of sights and sounds that they will one day need to work in.

COLLEGE LIFE

When puppies are between the ages of 18 months and two years old, they now have the physical and mental ability to start their formal guide work training. Puppy raisers bring them to "college" with the sadness of saying goodbye, but also the excitement of seeing all their hard work come to fruition.

Pictured below is Maisy, one of our youngest poodle puppies in training.





Training to be a guide dog can take up to eight months working with a qualified instructor. The dogs learn how to lead a person down the street, avoiding obstacles and stop to show them tripping hazards, such as curbs or stairs. When the person determines it is safe to cross a road, the dog vigilantly watches the intersection for cars that may have run a red light. The dogs are taught how to find a variety of points of interest, such as elevators, doors, and open seats.

THE PERFECT MATCH

Throughout the training, the instructors make a note of each dog's personality, areas that they excel, and unique characteristics that make them who they are. With this knowledge, instructors review applicants waiting to receive a dog from

People come from all over the United States to receive a Custom-Trained Guide Dog at no cost.

our school. When the right match is found, the visually impaired person is scheduled for a month-long class to train with their new partner.

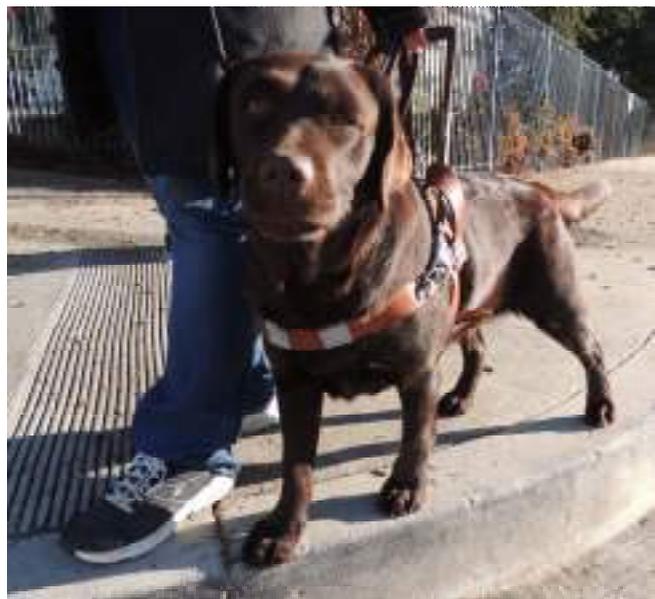
Classes are held at our desert campus for 28 days. Students live in a dorm so they can receive instruction in all aspects of having a guide dog, caring for and working with their new partner. The skills they learn and the bonding that takes place during this time set them up to be a successful working team when they return home.

At the conclusion of the training, a graduation ceremony celebrates the team and all the people who work to make these partnerships happen. People come from all over the United States to receive a Custom-Trained Guide Dog at no cost to them. They then return home to resume their daily lives of work, family, and leisure with a new partner by their side, guiding their way.

Update:

Maisy is in the beginning stages of learning about the world around her. Loki is still being trained to navigate this world. In a not so very far future, they will each help someone move confidently through their life with the grace and freedom that having a guide dog can bring.

Pictured below is Loki, one of our chocolate labs in formal training.



THE HEART OF AN APPRENTICE

Kelsi McCausland

Apprentice Guide Dog Instructor

I had the pleasure of being Harmon's primary instructor. When I first met him, I was in the early stages of my apprenticeship. I certainly have no business making judgments about size (being a whopping five feet myself), but I've seen purses that were bigger than this dog. I observed as my first set of training wheels pranced around the yard. For the first time, I called him over to me. His voluminous hair cascaded a rich shadow in my direction, as he approached. It was such a proud moment and short-lived, as he blew past me at about 40 knots.

We were 14 seconds into our partnership, and I was certain he didn't like me. So, I chose to study him, like a wildlife biologist, and find out what he liked. In the wilds of the play yard, I discovered he really liked toys. So, it started with a game. I spent some extra time in the yard playing with him one on one, and after getting to know one another, we began to dive into formal training.

Now Harmon had the unique opportunity to be taught by someone who had never done this before. I put a harness on this dog, and we both exchanged looks of concern. Pretty soon, we were both side by side, staring straight ahead into whatever fresh disaster awaited us. I was taught how to show the dog with the leash on how to move forward, and we took our first steps together. It was like witnessing a baby walking for the first time. I'm telling the dog to go forward, and my supervisor is telling me to get back into the following position. This makes the dog stop, but I want him to keep going, and it only got more complicated with turns.

It was the most bizarre choreography I had ever done. Our first weeks together were "ruff." We were both learning a new language and had to use that language to communicate with one another... It made it hard to see the final outcome.

It didn't happen instantly, but now we were starting to become a team. Even though we

were both still learning, we began to read one another better. We looked forward to disasters and got excited about the challenges. I could really see the intelligence in this dog, and he began picking up on my teaching very quickly. Tasks became easier, and before we knew it, we were walking around like professionals. We moved so elegantly together, and we were turning into a solid unit of fierce determination.

All that style and grace were quickly destroyed with one simple object that was handed to me at our preliminary testing. A blindfold. This one inch piece of foam was going to determine whether or not we were functional enough to continue with our training. We did pretty well during our first blindfold, all the struggle, and frustration, in the beginning, paid off.

As we continued training, we got the opportunity to do many more blindfolds, and it's certainly an interesting experience. At one point, we got a little lost with some intersecting sidewalks, and Harmon stopped me from



moving. We were looking for a door to enter a building, and when I reached out to see why we stopped, I found an object. It took me a while to figure out what it was until I found the handle. It was the handle of a car. I got a little excited when I figured out what it was, but it wasn't what I wanted. So, we continued on. I later found out that the owner of the vehicle was standing there waiting to get into her car that I was gently caressing.

We had the opportunity to practice under blindfold right before our final testing. We approached a challenging right turn that I knew very well and was prepared for. It required us to make a 180 degree turn and finish by coming back to the left. We made our right, and I knew we had overshot the left portion to complete the turn. I was determined not to ask my spotter for help. So, I kept issuing commands to my dog, and we kept blowing passed the curb we wanted. At one point, we were heading in the opposite direction.

We stopped, and I listened to the traffic. It was heavier than I remembered, which indicated to me that we were traveling along the busier road and had made a full left turn. We turned around and ended up in a parking lot. I listened to the traffic again. It was behind me. We broke it down into so many small steps and inched our way back to the curb we were initially trying

to find. It probably took us 10 minutes to make a right turn, but I was so proud. We never used our lifeline. It was just the dog and me.

This leads us up to the final blindfold. It was a relatively new route for both of us, and it went very well. I looked down at this spectacular dog and realized there wasn't anything more I could teach him. Harmon was the very first dog that I trained from start to finish, and I gave him the biggest hug on Dog Day. I was so excited for him and Betty. The rush of emotion got the better of me as I silently watched them meet for the first time.

I had the pleasure of seeing them take their first steps together in class and then following them on one of their final routes. I followed the team into a crosswalk where a distracted driver came speeding up to the intersection. She hit her breaks and stopped the car, but the one who reacted the quickest was Harmon. He stopped before the car did. He backed Betty up away from the car and slowly pulled her to the curb on the other side. Betty and Harmon were so calm, and I almost did something involuntary in my pants.

Being able to see firsthand what a guide dog can do for someone was both frightening and inspiring. Just knowing that I was a small part of that, is something that words can't begin to express.



Betty & Harmon

"I give thanks to God for the opportunity to come train at GDD. My experience here has been great! Harmon loves to work, and also likes to play. The trainers did an excellent job of teaching me how to work with Harmon with lots of patience. Along with hard work, we also had fun and laughter. I have the best dog I could ever have!"

**Harmon Sponsored by:
Roger J. and Margaret B. Harmon**

**Puppy Raised by:
Cindy Lyon**

CONGRATULATION GRADS!

CONGRATULATIONS GRADS!



Sharon & Julie

"Guide Dogs of the Desert has given me the confidence and independence to have the life I want to live. Julie is awesome and the perfect dog for me. The staff helped me in gaining freedom and the satisfaction of traveling with my Guide Dog."

Julie Sponsored by:
Sharyn Brackett

Puppy Raised by:
Karen Brodi



Jeff & Snoop

"The tremendous support I've felt from both GDD staff and my fellow students has allowed me to take on the rigorous, challenging, yet rewarding tasks of learning how to both care for and manage my Guide Dog, Snoop."

Snoop Sponsored by:
West Covina Lions Club

Puppy Raised by:
Wende Owens



Class of February 2020

YOU CAN HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

- **\$100** helps provide shampoo and grooming supplies for the dogs on campus during their training
- **\$250** helps provide toys and bowls for the dogs on campus during their training
- **\$500** helps feed our dogs for one month
- **\$750** helps provides the necessary equipment (leashes and harnesses) for our dogs during their training
- **\$1,000** helps provide medical services for our dogs during their journey to become a guide dog

\$5,000 – PUPPY SUPPORTER

- Name a puppy and join us for your named dog's journey
- Receive a birth announcement and photo of your named dog
- Receive update letters up to age 18 months
- Update letters will be sent at birth, nine months, and 18 months letting you know how your named puppy is doing on its journey

\$10,000 – PUPPY ADVOCATE (Our Most Popular Level)

- All of the above, plus:
- Private meeting with your named dog on our campus
- Photo of you with your named dog
- Private/VIP tour of our campus
- GDD pin to show your support of your named dog

\$20,000 – PUPPY CHAMPION

- All of the above, plus:
- Private meeting with your named dog, at your place of choosing
- Spend four hours with a GDD trainer - either for your own personal dog or with your named dog
- Dinner with a graduating class and their dogs
- Professional GDD leash for your personal dog or for your named dog, personalized
- Two tickets to Dog Day Afternoon, our signature fundraising event

\$40,000 – PUPPY HERO – NAME 2 PUPPIES!

- All of the above, but you get to name two puppies, plus:
- Session with a GDD professional to discuss nutrition for either your personal dog or for your named dog
- Four tickets to Dog Day Afternoon, our signature fundraising event

PUPPY RAISER EVENTS

Puppy Raisers are an integral component in preparing our puppies to become future guide dogs. They are responsible for care, socialization, and providing basic obedience training until the puppy is called back for formal training at 18 to 20 months of age. ***Thank you Puppy Raisers!***

Oak Glen
September 7, 2019



Canine Good Citizen Testing
November 9, 2019



Veterans Day Parade
November 11, 2019



Holiday Party
December 1, 2019



Sunline Bus Training
January 25, 2020



UPCOMING EVENTS



12th Annual Dog Day Afternoon

November 17, 2020

We will be honoring every ticket purchased for our Dog Day Afternoon event from the beginning of the year.

For more information visit www.gddca.org

MORE WAYS TO HELP

Visit our Amazon Wish List!

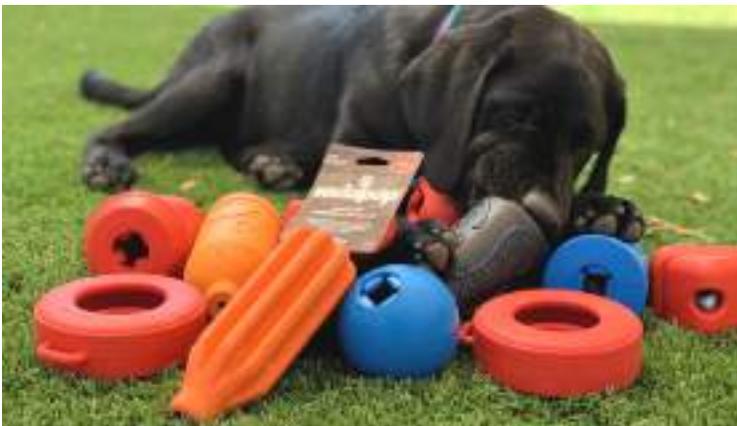
Now you can purchase items directly for GDD!



In addition to AmazonSmile, we now have a wishlist on Amazon that allows you to purchase items for GDD when they are needed. The list will be updated periodically with new items that will help future guide dogs.



Visit: tinyurl.com/GDDwish



GET 10% OFF YOUR PURCHASE AND
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