

SOUTHEASTERN GUIDE DOGS NEWS

Impact

SUMMER 2019

Best Friends

Kids matched with
life-changing dogs

Bella & Dixie
March On

KIDS CAMP: The exciting debut!

KIDS GIVE BACK: Meet young
puppy raisers and fundraisers

KIDS PROGRAM: Life unleashed
for the next generation



Southeastern Guide Dogs



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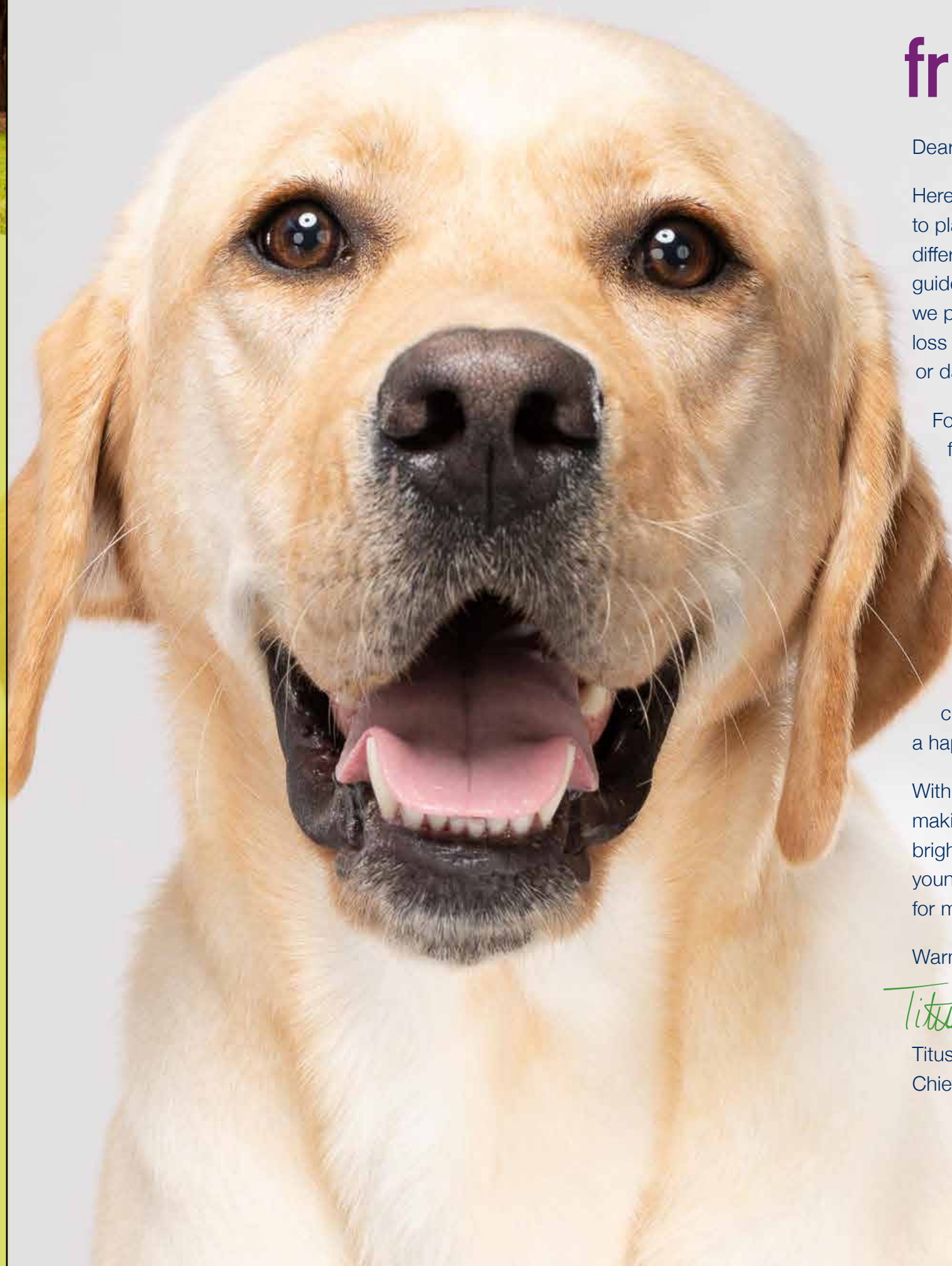
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from the CEO

Dear Friends,

Here at Southeastern Guide Dogs, we try to place every dog into a job that makes a difference, and that includes the highly-trained guide dogs and skilled companion dogs that we provide for children and teens with vision loss and for those who have lost their mom or dad in the military.

For these kids, our dogs become new best friends. They teach responsibility and social skills and help kids gain confidence. They provide natural stress relief and help children get outside more often for walks and playtime. Our dogs are an endless source of affection, not only for the child but for the entire family. For parents, our dogs bring joy, hope, and that sense of peace that comes when the sound of a child's laughter blends in with the sound of a happy dog.

With your help, we're making the world a brighter place for these young people. Thank you for making it all possible.

Warm regards,

Titus Herman
Chief Executive Officer





from the chairman of the board

Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for standing with Southeastern Guide Dogs and sharing your resources. As you know, we do not charge for our dogs or our services, and we receive no government funding.

Instead, we rely on you. And you haven't let us down.

Because of you, we continue to provide guide dogs for those facing sight loss and service dogs for servicemen and women. Now as we expand our programs for children and teens, we're helping even more families. And what better way to help than through the gift of a lovable, huggable, dog? It's simple, really, yet it's so profound how our dogs make such a difference. Thank you for your ongoing interest and support.

With gratitude,

Raymond W. Bishop
Chairman of the Board

YOUR GENEROSITY MAKES AN IMPACT. WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU



GUIDE DOGS FOR **TEENS**

Guide dogs open doors to freedom and confidence, and mature teens ages 15 and up may be ready for the significant rewards that come with dog ownership. For these adolescents, we offer a home-based guide dog program where our trainers provide hands-on instruction in the student's home, high school, and community.



Life Unleashed for the Next Generation

**PROGRAMS FOR
CHILDREN & TEENS**



KIDS COMPANION DOGS

Kids Companion Dogs build the bridge between the child of today and the independent guide dog handler of tomorrow by providing skilled companion dogs to children with vision loss. These children gain confidence, a sense of ownership, responsibility, and maturity by learning how to care for their dogs.

GOLD STAR FAMILY DOGS

Gold Star Family Dogs are our gifts to military families who have lost a loved one in service to our nation. These well-behaved and loving companion dogs offer comforting friendship and endless affection.



KIDS THERAPY DOGS

Kids Therapy Dogs are matched with adults who assist children and families facing difficult hardships and adverse circumstances. These dogs provide love, comfort, and therapeutic reassurance to children in need. Court-appointed advocates, child therapists, children's hospital staff members, and social workers are some examples of adults who find these dogs beneficial for the children they serve.



GUIDE DOG CAMPS

Our Guide Dog Camps for teens with vision loss provide hands-on experiences and in-depth information about guide dogs. Each teen learns about dog obedience and training techniques while working with a dog in harness. Parents learn too! Campers and parents stay in separate private rooms in our Student Center and enjoy the experiences of a lifetime.

Made for Each Other

FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD BELLA AND GUIDE DOG DIXIE MARCH ON



WHEN DIXIE WAS A PUPPY, puppy raisers Michele and Roger Reese had high hopes and big dreams for her future. They did all they could to help Dixie gain confidence. They taught her good manners. They socialized her with other puppies in their puppy raising group, and taught her to stay calm and focused in public. Of course, it helped that Dixie was born with a certain self-assured temperament and that she instinctively reacted with ease to new people and places.

When it came time to say goodbye to Dixie at Canine University, Michele and Roger left part of their hearts behind. Like other puppy raisers, they knew this day would come, but that didn't make it easier. And deep down, they knew Dixie had what it takes to succeed.



When Bella was a baby and suddenly stopped breathing, parents Michelle and Steve endured unfathomable fear. The

trauma damaged her optic nerve, leaving her legally blind, but Bella was strong and determined. Her parents had high hopes and big dreams for her future, and they did everything they could to help Bella gain confidence. They made sure she had all the tools and experiences she needed to stay calm and secure at school, despite the bullying she endured for being "different." Of course, it helped that Bella was born with a certain resilient temperament, one that instinctively drives her to seek independence. ▶



“AS SOON AS I PUT DIXIE’S HARNESS ON, SHE’S READY TO GO OUT AND EXPLORE THE WORLD, WHICH IS EXACTLY HOW I AM.”



Once in elementary school, Bella wrote a letter to Southeastern Guide Dogs asking for a guide dog, not understanding that she was too young. Over the years, she attended special events on our campus. And recently, when her Lighthouse for the Blind Transitions youth club took a field trip to our campus, Bella approached a staff member. “I want a guide dog,” she said. “How long do I have to wait?”

When Southeastern Guide Dogs opened our guide dog program to mature teens as young as 15, Bella immediately came to mind. She had just turned 15, and her robust schedule—marching band, music lessons, clubs, classes—showed that she was capable of taking on the responsibility. Her drive and desire were obvious; for most of her life, she’d been planning to get a guide dog.

AND THAT’S HOW BELLA MET DIXIE.

Our trainers worked with Bella and her new guide dog for about two weeks at home and in school, and now Bella and Dixie are inseparable. They both learn quickly and share the same sense of adventure. “When she’s not working, she’s super mellow,” says Bella. “But as soon as I put Dixie’s harness on, she’s ready to go out and

explore the world, which is exactly how I am. She’s got the perfect personality for me.”

Dixie guides Bella to her seven high school classes, after-school activities, and the Starbucks near her neighborhood. In crowded school hallways, classmates make way for her beautiful dog. “It’s so nice being able to walk without having to worry so much about obstacles in front of me, and just be able to move around them,” Bella says. Meanwhile, Dixie has a certain way of attracting attention. “I’ve definitely had a lot more people approach me,” she says. “People can’t help but be happy when there’s a dog around.”

Dixie loves her new home, and Bella is thrilled with her new independence. “Dixie makes travel so much easier for me,” she says. “Now I have more freedom to do what I want to do without having to rely on other people to help me. And I’m able to walk as fast as I’ve always wanted to without having to worry.”

And the adults? Raisers Michele and Roger are proud of Dixie, and parents Michelle and Steve enjoy more peace of mind knowing Bella and Dixie are facing the world together. And when the day comes for Bella to leave home for college, it won’t be easy. But with Dixie by her side, they know Bella has what it takes to succeed. ●



Life is Better HOPE with

On May 2, 2011, 25-year-old U.S. Army Special Forces Sgt. Aaron J. Blasjo said goodbye to his wife, Crystal, and five-week-old son, Talon. He left the base at Fort Bragg, N.C. for his third deployment to Afghanistan, following orders in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. President Obama announced that same day that Navy Seals killed Osama bin Laden, and tensions were high. A month later, on May 29th, enemy forces attacked Aaron's unit in the Wardak Province of Afghanistan. The improvised explosive device took four lives: Aaron, two other soldiers, and Aaron's special operations dog, Hunter.

Talon was just eight weeks old and would never know the man who loved him most.

A few years later, officials at Fort Bragg dedicated a special forces canine complex in memory of Aaron, and that's when Talon began asking his mom for a dog. "Aaron was a dog handler and Talon is following in his footsteps—he loves dogs," Crystal says. Talon's boyhood dreams came true when he received the gift of Hope, a sweet and playful black Labrador, provided through our Gold Star Family Dog program.

Talon is now 8 years old and takes Hope with him whenever he can. Hope waits patiently on the sidelines while Talon plays football and basketball. "Their bond is unbreakable in my eyes," Crystal says. "Hope walks right by his side and never fails to give him her utmost love when he needs it the most." Crystal says that Hope is the missing piece they needed and that Talon especially longed for a dog in the moments when he missed having his dad.

"We could not have asked for a better dog and addition to our family," she says. "In December it will be two years since Hope came, and I couldn't imagine what life would be without her. She is truly heaven-sent." ●



WHEN YOU GIVE THE GIFT OF HOPE, THE WORLD BECOMES A BRIGHTER PLACE



Best Friends Hadley & Vernon

Diagnosed with a rare type of noncancerous brain tumor at age 3, Hadley, now 6, has undergone two brain surgeries and thirty rounds of radiation. She lost all of her vision and has serious medical conditions that require constant monitoring and attention.

But what Hadley hasn't lost is her energy and drive to keep learning and enjoying life. The City of Pembroke Pines Police Department recently honored Hadley as her elementary school's Student of the Month. The criteria for this honor include exemplary behavior, good citizenship, and being a good role model, and that's Hadley! She's smart too. Her mom, Fiona, a former RN, says that Hadley is studying braille and learning to use a cane for orientation and mobility.

One of the things this sweet young girl loves more than anything is the companionship of animals—especially cuddling. So, it is no surprise that it was “love at first

sight” for Hadley and her new Kids Companion Dog, an adorable, affectionate golden retriever named Vernon. Vernon loves to cuddle too, and he sleeps in Hadley's room so he's there in the dark when she needs him.

Vernon encourages Hadley, and she's doing a great job of taking care of him. They're best friends. She's his primary caretaker and official “treat-giver,” and she feeds, grooms, and plays with him every day. Like all of our Kids Companion Dogs, Vernon gives his young handler confidence, a sense of ownership, and purpose to help her move forward in the face of adversity. “We knew Hadley would love her own special friend,” says Fiona.

Hadley enjoys her independence and proudly brings her family along to walk Vernon. Mom and daughter hold hands, and, together, they walk him around the neighborhood. “This is such an amazing experience,” says Fiona. “We just love Vernon. He is so much a part of our family. And we can't thank Southeastern Guide Dogs enough.” ●

BE A HERO FOR CHILDREN LIKE HADLEY



Vernon, Robert, Hadley, Fiona, and Noah



GET TO
KNOW

BESTIES LIKE US



Jon age 11

My dog: Sailor (Kids Companion Dog)

My favorite thing to do with my dog:
I like to throw the ball and have him chase it. It's fun to see him run.

When I grow up: *I want to work at NASA.*



Kelly age 12

My dog: Monte (Kids Companion Dog)

My dog's nickname: Monte Girl

My favorite thing to do with my dog: snuggle

When I grow up: *I want to be healthy.*



Millie age 9

My dog: Miracles (Kids Companion Dog)

My favorite thing to do with my dog: snuggle on the couch

When I grow up: *I want to be a ballroom dancer.*

Talon age 8

My dog: Hope (Gold Star Family Dog)

My dog's nickname: Hopers

My favorite thing to do with my dog: roll around and play catch

When I grow up: *I want to be a football player and Army dog handler.*



Madison age 11

My dog: Sam (Kids Companion Dog)

My dog's nickname: Sam a Lamb

My favorite thing to do with my dog: *I like to take Sam on walks; take her to a field to run and work on the commands she learned in training. She is the sweetest!*

When I grow up: *I want to be a professional dancer.*



Catie-Anne age 13

My dog: Webber (Gold Star Family Dog)

My dog's nickname: Webb, Webbie, Chicken Nugget, Shaggy Carpet . . . I could go on and on.

My favorite thing to do with my dog: cuddle and read

When I grow up: *I want to be a spa owner.*



Anna Grace age 13

My dog: Sundae (Kids Companion Dog)

My dog's nickname:

Sunday-Sunday, Friday-Friday, Velcro

My favorite thing to do with my dog: throw the ball or toys, watch TV together

When I grow up: *I'm not sure yet, but I want to do something in science because that is my favorite subject.*



Lauren age 13

My dog: Lynn (Kids Companion Dog)

My dog's nickname: Winnie

My favorite thing to do with my dog: take walks on the beach

When I grow up: *I might want to be a braille teacher.*



DOUBLE YOUR
DONATION
WITH THE

Norm-for-Kids Challenge

Dear Friends,

My late husband Norman and I started volunteering at Southeastern Guide Dogs about 23 years ago. It was something we enjoyed doing together, and after he passed away in 2005, his memory stays with me as I continue my involvement.



Phyllis
Siskel

I have loved seeing the organization grow over the years, and it warms my heart to see how many people we are helping. It all started with guide dogs for people with vision loss, and I remember when we started helping veterans with disabilities. And now we're helping children and their families too, which is a wonderful idea.

In fact, here's what I've decided to do. I'd like to help more children, so **I will match all contributions, dollar-for-dollar up to \$25,000**, with all of the proceeds supporting the children and teens programs at Southeastern Guide Dogs. I know Norm would have loved seeing these beautiful dogs go to children who need them,

so I'm calling it the **"Norm-for-Kids Challenge"** in his honor.

Will you help me raise \$50,000? You can double your donation when you send in your gift. I think it's a wonderful idea and I hope you do too.

Warmly,

Phyllis Siskel

DOUBLE YOUR DOLLARS when you send
your best gift by September 30, 2019!



Jon with Kids Companion Dog Sailor

» » » Please use the enclosed envelope or save on postage
and give online at guidedogs.org/normforkids

Happy Campers

Our first-ever Guide Dog Camp was truly a family affair

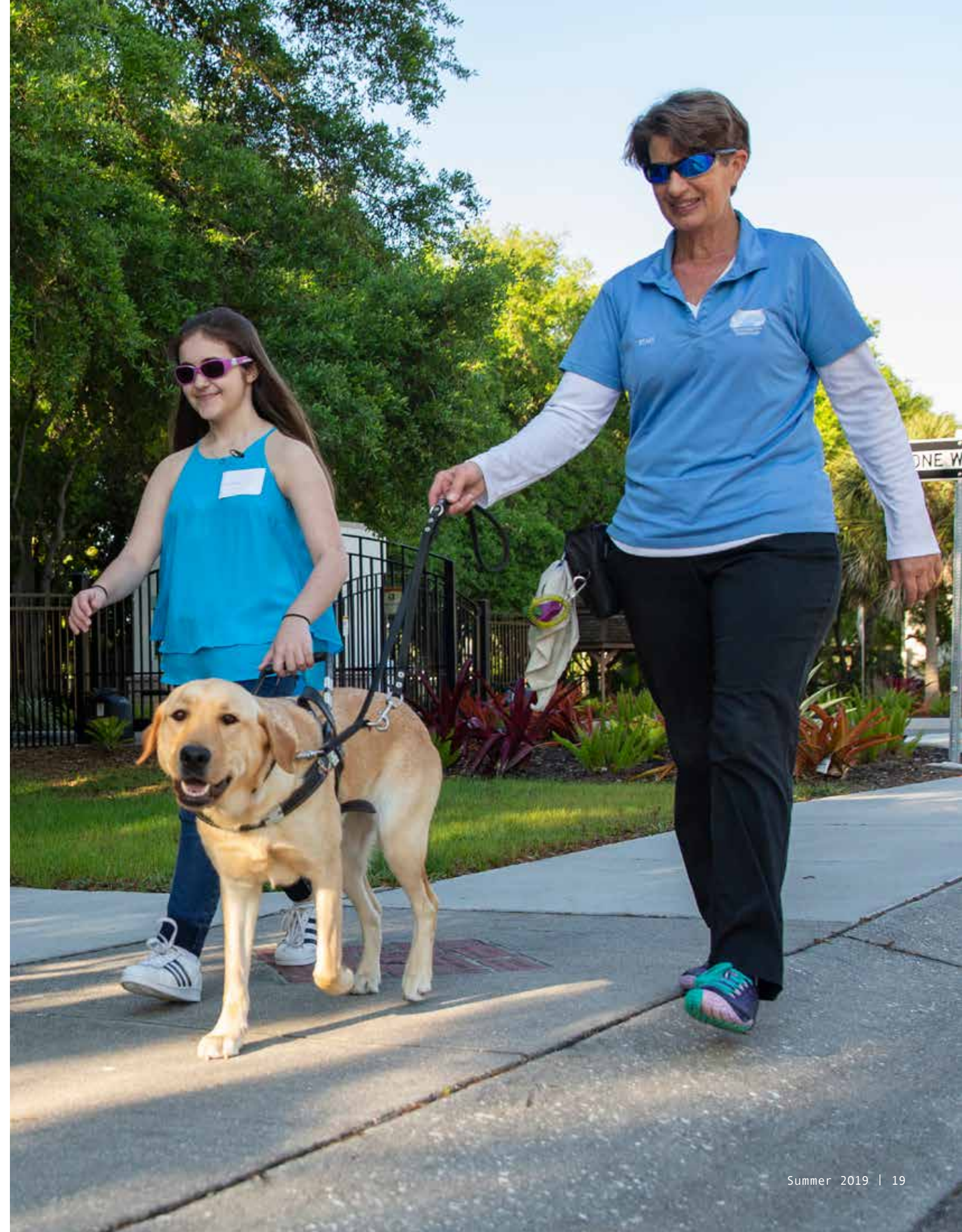


Many children with vision loss think about one day getting a guide dog. But they've got questions. How does it work? What does it feel like? How can I trust a dog not to walk me into an obstacle?

Parents have questions too. How much does it cost? How will I know when my child is ready? How can I trust a dog not to put my child in harm's way?

Welcome to Guide Dog Camp, our new two-day, overnight, no-cost, hands-on learning experience for visually impaired teens ages 14 to 17 and their parents. Think of it as "Guide Dogs 101," where teens and parents experience working with a dog in harness while learning all about training, caring for, and living with a guide dog.

We recently held our first Guide Dog Camp and welcomed six families to campus. They stayed in our dorm rooms (Teens got their own rooms!) and dined in our dining hall. Each of the teens was paired for the day with a trained guide dog, and they all loved it. ▶





Seeing the dog lead their child safely around obstacles opened a world of possibilities.

Some of the parents got teary-eyed when they watched their teen take hold of the dog's harness and walk at a normal pace. Seeing the dog lead their child safely around obstacles opened a world of possibilities. When the parents put on blindfolds and held the harness themselves, they gained new appreciation for what their children go through and the tremendous capabilities of our elite guide dogs.

"This is a golden opportunity for any teenager who's interested in getting a guide dog," said Elise, one of the moms in the group.

"I've always been excited to get a guide dog, and I think this will really help me push to get one—this has had a positive effect on my life," said her 15-year-old daughter, Annabell. "It felt like I could

trust the dog more than just myself with my white cane. With the cane, I might hit something; but with the dog, he stopped, and I realized, 'I can go around this.' I realized I could rely on the dog and I wouldn't fall down."

Our first camp was a resounding success, and the dates are set for our next session this summer. The feedback we received speaks

for itself: "Exceeded my expectations—way more than I expected." "I loved the obstacle course with a guide dog." "I want to do it again!" "I loved the blindfold walk, it gave me a perspective of what it will be like for my child." "The pace of the agenda was perfect." "Wish we could stay longer." "The facilities were so nice; not what I was expecting when you say 'camp.'" and "I want to come back and work here!" ●

INVEST IN A CHILD'S FUTURE

GIVE THE GIFT OF INDEPENDENCE



STEP Club | Savannah Puppy Raisers

At Georgia Southern University, a group of college students are members of the Service Dog Training & Education Program (STEP), a club of 40 students. Within the club, five are current puppy raisers, three more will receive puppies this summer, five are approved puppy sitters, and many members serve in support roles.

Kassidi | Houston Puppy Raisers

Kassidi, a high school junior, wanted to raise a puppy because she wanted the opportunity to change someone's life. She's the captain of her softball team, has been the treasurer and secretary of her FFA

KIDS GIVE BACK

PUPPY RAISERS

Natasha | Houston Puppy Raisers

Natasha, a high school senior, has always loved dogs and realizes how important they are to the people they help. She is the president of her school's FFA organization, a member of the National Honor Society, and participates in many other clubs and activities. Natasha plans to one day become a veterinarian and is raising her first puppy, Clara.

Alec and Tate | Eastern Hillsborough County Puppy Raisers

Brothers Alec and Tate have raised puppies since they were 13 and 14, respectively. Tate started first with his mom, Mikki, as co-raiser. Inspired by his brother, Alec started raising a puppy with his

dad, Brad. But the whole family pitches in, and so far they've raised puppies Kathleen, Bentley, Jewel, and now Maka. Tate is 18 and graduates from high school this year. He has permission for Alec's current pup, Maka, to walk with him at commencement.

Katie | Gainesville and Fort Myers Puppy Raisers

Katie, along with her mom, Kristine, began raising puppies when she was 11 years old. She has raised Bowie, Evie Lee, Brook, Stoney, and now Sam. Katie attends the University of Florida, and Sam does too! Her Fort Myers area coordinator says Katie is an excellent young raiser—a model raiser for any age. When Katie was younger, she made and sold dog collars to raise funds for our Walkathon.

organization, is a member of the National Honor Society, and participates in many other extracurricular activities. Kassidi is raising her first puppy, Butter.

Leah | Jacksonville Puppy Raisers

At age 11, Leah began raising puppies with her mom, Jennifer. She has raised puppies Foley, Hardy, Barney, Sandy, Elaine, Charlie, and she is currently raising Cesar. Now 17, Leah has displayed an incredible sense of maturity, dedication, and commitment. ●



FUNDRAISERS

Since 2009, the children

of the Faith Community Church Pioneer Club in Seminole, Florida have held an annual pet walkathon and share the proceeds with our school.



Several troops from the Girl Scouts of West Central Florida and the Girl Scouts of Gulf Coast Florida support our school through our Walkathon and other fundraisers. Three Girl Scouts recently donated their cookie reward money of \$200 each. Sweet!



Students from Taylor Ranch Elementary School in Venice, Florida have raised funds to sponsor puppies since 2004, and the school has named puppies Star, Blaze, Galaxy, Taylor, and Dusty. The kids love it when local puppies-in-training pay a visit.

Avery and Jack are a brother and sister who went door-to-door in their Bradenton, Florida neighborhood collecting funds for Southeastern Guide Dogs.



Alonso High School JROTC program in Tampa, Florida fundraised for our veterans program and raised enough to name a puppy "ROTC." Salute!

St. Paul's Early Learning Center preschool children, the Junior Knights, held a bike-a-thon fundraiser in St. Petersburg, Florida and raised enough to name a puppy "Knight." ●



HERITAGE
SOCIETY

Guide Dog Camp student, Darcey,
with trainer Stefanie Spence,
and guide dog in training.

Tomorrow's Legacy

At Southeastern Guide Dogs, we're committed to our students today—and also tomorrow. We've seen so many successes and helped thousands of people regain independence at the hands of our extraordinary dogs. And tomorrow's students will have the same opportunity—all because of our Heritage Society.

The Heritage Society is a group of caring individuals committed to ensuring the long-term stability of our school. By pledging lasting support through their wills, they enable Southeastern Guide Dogs to continue our mission well into the future.

Leave a legacy for tomorrow when
you join our Heritage Society today.

Sign up at [GuideDogs.org/HS](https://www.GuideDogs.org/HS)