

Life

UNLEASHED

MAGAZINE

FALL 2022

AN UNEXPECTED GIFT

NOW PLAYING:
BELIEVE IN HOPE

FALLING FOR FIN

GIVING HOPE,
GETTING HOPE

Veteran David Caras
and Service Dog Bobb

*Believe
in*
Hope

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from our CEO

Dear Supporter,

Hope is a warm blanket on a chilly autumn night. A cold nose nudging you up after a fall. A wagging tail urging you to reach higher.

When our students receive our dogs, they discover hope. When military children those desperately missing their mom or dad receive our dogs, they gain hope. With your help, they find joy in 60 lively pounds of tail wagging, toy-tugging, love lavishing, confidence boosting, freedom delivering hope.

When you support our mission, you give the gift of hope to those who need it most. Because of you, our students gain a best friend, along with independence, confidence, and the kind of hope that truly saves lives.

Your support means everything to the people who rely on us. Thank you for bringing our mission to life. Thank you for believing in hope.

With gratitude,

Titus Herman
Chief Executive Officer



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Life UNLEASHED MAGAZINE

A publication of
Southeastern Guide Dogs

Southeastern Guide Dogs transforms lives by creating and nurturing extraordinary partnerships between people and dogs. We breed, raise, and train elite guide dogs, service dogs, and skilled companion dogs and provide life-changing services for people with vision loss, veterans with disabilities, and children with significant challenges. We offer our premier dogs and lifetime follow-up services at no cost. Since 1982, we have successfully created thousands of guide and service dog teams throughout the U.S. and currently oversee the well-being of over 1,200 puppies and dogs. [Guidedogs.org](https://www.Guidedogs.org)

Writer & Editor-in-Chief
Leslie Rowe

Contributing Writer
DP Knudten

Art Director
Anne Meskey Elhajoui

Photographer
Chris Lake

Personal snapshots provided by graduates and family members.

Cover photo by Chris Lake



4210 77th St E, Palmetto, FL 34221
[guidedogs.org](https://www.guidedogs.org) | 941.729.5665

from our chairman of the board

Dear Fellow Supporter,

Think back to a time when you lost hope. It's part of the human condition; we've probably all been there. But how many times have you felt that way, only to be encouraged by something as simple as the smile of a friend or the warmth of a dog?

Hope starts with small acts of caring and kindness. Hope starts with you and me, doing thoughtful things that can make a tremendous impact in someone's life when they need it most. During the pandemic, Southeastern Guide Dogs volunteers brought dogs to the hospital parking lot simply to cheer up our team. What an amazing difference it made!

Thank you for believing in hope—and for believing in the mission of Southeastern Guide Dogs through your generous giving, offering a bright future to the people who need our dogs.

Warmly,

Bob Meade
Board Chair, Southeastern Guide Dogs
Chief Executive Officer, Doctors Hospital of Sarasota



Board of Directors

Members of our prestigious Board of Directors are dedicated to governance, strategic planning, financial management, advocacy, and resource development. This group of leaders brings passion and commitment to the organization and plays a pivotal role in our work of providing extraordinary dogs and life-changing services to the people who need them. Members include:

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Our dedicated Mission Advancement Council works tirelessly to create and implement our "friendraising" strategy—forming and cultivating relationships with individuals who share our values and vision to secure the long-term success of our organization. Members include:

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a Vision of Hope

WITH HER DOG,
LIFE TAKES ON A
NEW PERSPECTIVE

For years, people said, “Clare, you’re clumsy. You fall over everything.” She never knew why the soccer ball seemed so elusive; why she felt so inept. “They thought I wasn’t paying attention,” she says. “And I was so determined, thinking, ‘But I *am* paying attention. I don’t know how to pay *more* attention, no matter how hard I try!’”

 As a toddler, Clare Weigel never spoke, and her parents were shocked to learn she was deaf. She received her first cochlear implant before turning two and her second at seven. “It was tough—I was in speech therapy for ten years,” she recalls. But her hearing impairment didn’t explain the trips and falls.

As a high school freshman, she couldn’t wait to get her driver’s permit. Clare studied for the test and carefully planned her outfit for the license photo. A few days before the appointment, she saw her eye doctor for an annual checkup.

“I want another doctor to take a look,” the doctor said. Clare’s eyes stumped several specialists but eventually, they identified the diagnosis.

CLARE WEIGEL AND GUIDE DOG FIN



"It was Usher Syndrome," she says. "It's a hereditary disease—with type 1, you're deaf from birth, you have balance issues, and your vision loss is progressive."

"It was bewildering," she continues. "I found out in the same five minutes that I'd been mostly blind my entire life and did not know it. I was now ineligible for a driver's license, but I was eligible for a guide dog—all in the same five minutes. I cried for five hours straight. It was a lot to process, and I went through all the stages of grief."

With help from supportive parents, Clare made it through the awkward

teenage years, reluctant to disclose her vision problems after being the only deaf girl in school. Slowly adjusting to her new reality, she attended Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, studied abroad in London, and graduated with a degree in journalism and public relations. During the slower pace of the pandemic, she applied and was accepted to grad school at Georgetown University.

Meanwhile, her vision worsened, and trips and falls became a daily threat. At her doctor's urging and with looming plans to move to the unfamiliar Washington, D.C., Clare turned to Southeastern Guide Dogs. And that's how she met her new best friend, co-adventurer, and guide dog.

Clare first met Fin when the Southeastern Guide Dogs instructor visited her home in Tampa, Florida, for a preliminary test walk.

"I told my family, 'It's just a test walk. At least I'll know what it feels like to hold a harness,'" she says. "Then Fin bounces out of the van, and I immediately fall in love with him. We put the harness on, and we're walking, and Fin



Dogs of Destiny

Watch Clare and Fin together on "Finding Focus" at [GuideDogs.org/DogsofDestiny](https://www.GuideDogs.org/DogsofDestiny)

stops at a crack in the sidewalk. He looks at me, and that's when I know. I one-hundred-percent know. My mom says later, 'You love him, don't you?' and I answer, 'I do!'

"Later, I remember getting the phone call, and they tell me they found the perfect dog for me. I'm so excited. When the instructor arrives at our front door, I ask, 'Is it Fin?' and she says, 'Yes, Fin is the only choice for you.' I am so happy!"

Under Fin's guidance, Clare can now see what she'd been missing. Before Fin, she peered low, scanning for tripping hazards, but now she holds her

head high. "Oh my gosh, there are so many things I've never noticed before," she exclaims. "My dad said, 'You look taller,' and my mom told him, 'Yes, because she's not hunched over. She's not looking at the ground.'"

Fin goes everywhere with Clare, and the two make quite a vision when Clare enjoys her favorite hobby: photography. "I'm sure it must be ironic for people to see a woman with a guide dog and a camera," she says, laughing. "I've always loved photography, and I actually see better through the camera's scope."

Clare says there are two Fins. "Working Fin is determined and focused. He's like, 'I'm going to get you where you're going.' Georgetown is ninety percent brick sidewalks, so there's always a brick out of place. Fin sees it and stops, his paw perfectly on the out-of-place brick. He's like, 'I found this. You won't trip on it now.' But Fin out of harness—he's the goofiest dog you will ever meet. He's bouncy and joyful.

"Working with Fin is amazing," she adds. "I feel way more confident going out the door. Fin gives me peace of mind. I know he's got me." ●



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JAMES AND CHERMAN
KIDS COMPANION DOG



HOPE

The Future of

TODAY, HE NEEDS A FRIEND. TOMORROW, HE'LL NEED A GUIDE DOG.

THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BOY QUITE LIKE JAMES.

At six, this curious child knows no strangers; talks non-stop to anyone; holds long conversations over the fence with the grown-up neighbor; asks his patent-attorney dad complex, abstract questions; plays the violin, accompanied by his mom on piano; identifies orchestra instruments in original Beatles songs; dances to vintage Van Halen LP albums on an old stereo (after following the parental rule of "no Van Halen before 8:00 a.m."); and has learned to take 21 pills per session in his lifelong fight against childhood cancer, the same cancer that stole his vision.

For that last skill, though, James needs a little help from his best friend, Cherman. A Kids Companion Dog for kids with vision loss, Cherman always rests his head on James' knee during weekly pill time, as if to say, "C'mon James, you can do it—I'm right here with you."

"I love you, Chermie. You're the best yellow dog of all time," says James, every day.

"He's a quirky dog, and so affectionate by nature," says James' dad, Wiley.

Inseparable, the two share life like soulmates, bosom buddies, Frick and Frack. Sure, they also play with James' siblings, 9-year-old Eliza and 7-year-old Charlie, but where James goes, Cherman follows.

When James plays the violin, Cherman listens at his feet. When the kids build a fort out of pillows and blankets, Cherman's bed sits in the middle. When James races around the backyard or swings on the swing, Cherman races too, and has learned to avoid James' wild, swinging feet. Since James can't see Cherman very well, his dog waits patiently for the jump-off, avoiding a collision.

But this smart, well-behaved, people-loving, cuddly dog is there for more than fun-and-games, despite appearances. He's there on a mission, one that parents Eva and Wiley planned from the beginning.

Diagnosed at three months old with a glioma, a spider-web-like tumor that presses on the optic nerve, James has fought cancer longer than he remembers, with his parents leading the charge. Full of faith, prayer, and hard-won information, they're playing the long game and planning for James' future—one full of hope, and one that someday includes a guide dog.

"Cherman isn't officially a guide dog—but one of the reasons I love this relationship James is building is because having a service dog is going to be essential," says Wiley. "In all likelihood, he's not going to be able to live independently without having a dog. My greatest hope for James is that he will be healthy and be able to lead a full and active life. I don't know that he will be able to see much as he gets older, but he has a really profound intellect. I hope that will continue to develop, and that James will be able to go through high school, college, graduate school—if that's what he wants to do—and go out in the world and be gainfully employed and independent."

"I would love anything for James that will help him have a full, independent life," says Eva. "I 100% think a guide dog would open doors for him to do things he may not be able to do on his own. Right now, he holds my hand, he holds a teacher's hand, he holds my husband's hand, he holds his sister's hand. But we can't do everything with him forever—I probably won't go to college with him. But I hope he has a dog he can rely on, that can enable him to do a lot more than he could otherwise.

"There's no denying the whole family loves Cherman, but we got Cherman for James," Eva continues. "Cherman is part of James' big, full life—he's James' special friend. We always talk about how much we love him and how grateful we are for him. It's a blessing to have Cherman. He's part of the family." ●

Dogs of Destiny
Watch James and Cherman together on "String Theory" at GuideDogs.org/DogsofDestiny



Believe in Hope

NOW SHOWING ON A SCREEN NEAR YOU

Watch our wholesome, heartfelt, holiday feel-good, **Believe in Hope.**
[GuideDogs.org/Hope](https://www.GuideDogs.org/Hope)

Following up on the extraordinary success of our 2018 YouTube viral phenomenon, *Pip*, we bring you our newest animated short, *Believe in Hope*.

Who is Hope?

She's a sweet, smart, and steadfast service dog, arriving just in time to live up to her name.

Believe in Hope is a heartwarming, animated tale sharing an inspiring look at how our dogs spread hope wherever they go. It will warm your heart, bring a smile to your lips—and maybe even a tear to your eyes.

But don't take our word for it. Check it out online right now.

In only 60 seconds, can Hope change the world for one veteran who's lost his way? Will our military hero find hope again through this unexpected gift? Find out today!



Jack, a United States Marine Corps veteran, recognizes today's mission: add some cheer to his lonely Christmas. Unfortunately, a war injury stops him short.

Dispirited, he gives up—until he receives an unexpected gift. Her name is Hope!

Watch the magic grow as the two meet for the first time. Feel the real spirit of the season in this heartwarming animated video from Southeastern Guide Dogs. *Believe in hope.*

Thank you to the Patten Family Foundation for generously sponsoring the production of *Believe in Hope*, and to Gary and Melody Johnson for kindly sponsoring its advertising campaign.





Jeff Lowery and Guide Dog (now Service Dog!) Quincy

Hope

Restored

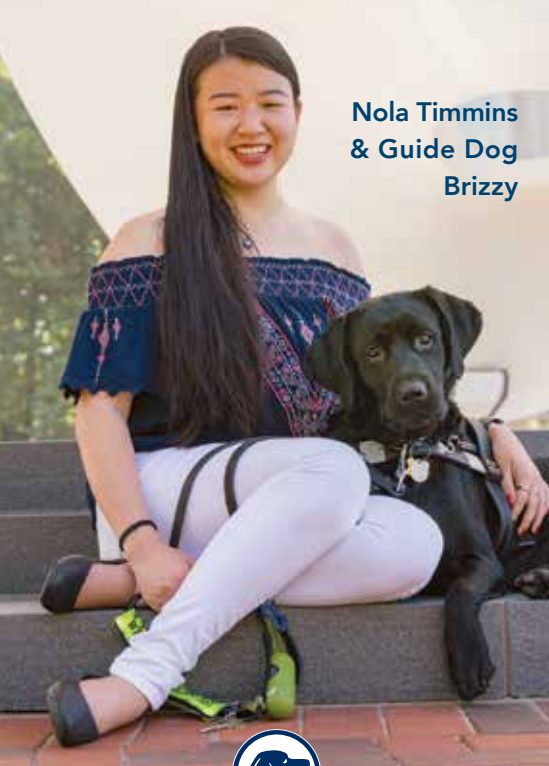
A DOG RESTORED HIS HOPE. A MIRACLE RESTORED HIS EYESIGHT.

Never in the 40-year history of Southeastern Guide Dogs has someone offered to return a guide dog because his vision came back. But Jeff Lowery did, sobbing after hanging up the phone. "I thought I was going to lose her," Jeff explains. "Quincy loves to work, and because I was no longer blind, morally and ethically, I didn't feel it was right for me to use her in public, even though she brings me so much calm and peace." Years after experiencing blunt-force trauma to the head, Jeff lost vision in one eye. As a behavioral analyst for severely abused youth offenders, he took a pipe to the head while apprehending a runaway teen and was left for days bleeding in a field. That attack—the worst of many—left visible scars and ghosts of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Doctors treated his anxiety, hypervigilance, sleeplessness, and night terrors with a cocktail of medications, which—combined with therapy and his faith—kept Jeff alive.



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But his world collapsed when he lost vision in the other eye, presumably from old injuries. Immobilized by depression and fear, Jeff's old recliner became home. He lost his driver's license, independence, confidence, and identity as a tough and capable man's man and involved husband and father.

"My whole world—as I knew it—ended," Jeff explains. "When you lose your vision, you take away your security . . . your trust . . . and you're trapped in a dark and darkened world."

"Jeff is an extrovert," shares his wife, Sara. "When the vision loss occurred, he became reclusive and isolated. I felt helpless. It was hard to see him lose that light and life he had carried and to see him in a fragile and weaker state. It was shocking because he not only had PTSD and the trauma we were working through as a couple, but now he had another health crisis with vision loss."

But then a guide dog named Quincy restored Jeff's hope, starting with their first night together.

Jeff had learned to navigate with a cane, but hoping for more independence, he came to Southeastern Guide Dogs. As he learned to navigate with his new guide, he realized how much he needed Quincy.

"The first time I slept in years was at the Southeastern Guide Dogs campus," Jeff recalls. Quincy wasn't trained to help with post-traumatic stress—she was trained to help Jeff travel safely and independently. But her absolute love and innate ability to sense distress meant Jeff got more than he asked for in this sweet and playful Labrador.

"The day Quincy came home was exciting," Sara recalls. "I



"I WAS THRILLED . . . AND I CRIED AGAIN BECAUSE I GOT TO KEEP QUINCY WITH ME. THE STAFF AT SOUTHEASTERN GUIDE DOGS HAS NEVER DEALT WITH THIS BEFORE, BUT YOU WOULDN'T KNOW IT—THEY'RE PHENOMENAL."

could see hope re-installed in Jeff, which was encouraging. We were on the horizon of a new, fresh start."

Four years passed, and with Quincy's help, Jeff adjusted to vision loss. The days blurred with kids, school, work, and church. But one day marked the beginning of a miracle.

A friend mentioned his own PTSD medication's adverse side effects.

"I was in the medical field," Sara says. "Pharmacology interests me, so I looked it up. The side effects were blurred vision and neurological issues. Jeff was starting to get shaky; they thought he might have



Dogs of Destiny
Watch Jeff and Quincy together on "See to Believe" at [GuideDogs.org/DogsofDestiny](https://www.GuideDogs.org/DogsofDestiny)

the early onset of Parkinson's. He had four or five side effects that lined up with this drug." After consulting with his pharmacist and doctor, Jeff began weaning off that medication.

Three weeks later, Jeff called Sara with a now-humorous observation. "I saw dog poop in the backyard," he told her. "I actually saw it. I could tell it from the gray of the rocks!" It took Jeff about two weeks to regain full vision in his left eye. The right eye remains blind from trauma, but his left eye returned to 20/20.

Jeff's joy at his restored vision—and the freedom of driving again!—was tempered by his growing conviction that Quincy was destined for more. "I called the Southeastern Guide Dogs instructor and said, 'Quincy needs to work. She needs to go to somebody else who is blind.' Then I hung up and sobbed because I thought I would lose her."

When faced with significant decisions, the Southeastern Guide Dogs team always asks: *What's best for the dog?* and *What's best for the person?*

After consulting with guide dog instructors, service dog instructors, and leadership, the instructor called Jeff back.

"Hey Jeff," she said. "How about I come to your house, and we work on transitioning Quincy from a guide dog to a PTSD service dog?"

"I was thrilled, then I hung up, and I cried again because I got to keep Quincy with me," Jeff says. "The staff at Southeastern Guide Dogs are so loving. They've never dealt with this before, but you wouldn't know it—they're just phenomenal."

As Quincy hones skills to help Jeff's PTSD, she excels at the *touch* and the *hug* cues because the real miracle resides in Quincy's touch.

"If I start disconnecting or become ungrounded, she's there," Jeff explains. "She'll lay on my foot or lean against my leg. And it's so comforting that you're not experiencing this stuff alone. You've got someone there, and you're being loved, because she adores me. She takes away fear, and her touch brings peace. Someone once said that I have a 'tenacity of hope.' And I didn't have that until I got Quincy." ●




Give Hope

Million-Dollar Matching Challenge

When people lose their vision—it's easy to lose hope. When veterans lose hope—it's easy to give up everything. But there is hope.

Hope can be found in the magic between humans and dogs. Because of you, people with vision loss, veterans with disabilities, and children with unique challenges come for a dog—and leave with a friend. They leave with hope, confidence, freedom, and a dog that never leaves their side.

 Give the gift of hope today and multiply your impact, because your donation will be doubled by the Patten Family Foundation's Give Hope Million-Dollar Matching Challenge.

Meet Harry Patten, whose companies have been featured in *Inc.*, *Business Week*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Fortune*. He is an honored member of the "Who's Who of American Business Leaders" as well as the distinguished Horatio Alger Association. Along with his wife, Rita, Harry also devotes time, energy, and resources to the Patten Family Foundation.



As dog lovers, Harry and the Patten family have long held an interest in the role dogs play in people's lives. When Harry encountered Southeastern Guide Dogs, he immediately connected with our lovable, intelligent Labradors and with our mission to transform the lives of veterans with disabilities, people with vision loss, and children with significant challenges.

Do you have a donor-advised fund? Now is the perfect time to put those philanthropic dollars to work on behalf of our extraordinary dogs, transforming lives throughout the United States.

Give Hope. Double your donation, up to \$1 million dollars!
Give today at [Guide Dogs.org/givehope](https://www.guide-dogs.org/givehope)





DAVE CARAS AND
SERVICE DOG BOBB

GIVING HOPE

First, he raised future service dogs. Then, he needed his own.

GETTING HOPE

GIVING HOPE

Fortunately, Dave Caras can't remember the moment his body connected with the car, smashing him into the windshield at 60 miles per hour then dragging him underneath for nearly 200 yards.

Unfortunately, the accident and traumatic brain injury cost this Coast Guard veteran a leg and a whole lot more.

During a business trip to Hill Air Force Base near Salt Lake City, Utah, he'd been out training for his next Ironman Triathlon. Running cleared his mind, and he focused on the upcoming competition with its 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride, and 26.2-mile marathon.

Then he woke up in a hospital bed, far from home and unable to move.

"I was lucky," Dave says. "The first officer on scene was a Navy SEAL paramedic just back from Iraq the year before. They thought I was a goner. And there was a LifeFlight helicopter taking off from the

GETTING HOPE

GIVING HOPE GETTING HOPE GIVING HOPE GETTING HOPE GIVING HOPE GETTING HOPE GIVING HOPE GETTING HOPE

University of Utah for a night training flight. They overheard the radio traffic about me getting hit and decided they would land in the parking lot next to the road—they flew me to the hospital.”

The night Dave got “lucky,” he was working as a contractor, consulting on C-130 aircraft maintenance and instruction. Previously, he retired from the Coast Guard after an adrenaline-pumping career of search and rescue, helicopter aviation, and Caribbean anti-narcotics operations.

After the Coast Guard, Dave missed the military. “I wanted to help veterans somehow,” he explains. “And I had lost a dog before that.” So, for several years, Dave volunteered to raise puppies for Southeastern Guide Dogs, giving hope to other veterans who need our dogs. He raised four puppies and served as an area coordinator, helping other puppy raisers succeed.

But while raising future service dogs, he never imagined that one day he’d find hope in a dog of his own.

After the accident, Dave’s athleticism and sheer force of will helped carry him through his recovery. Today, he runs, bikes, swims, skis, sails, climbs mountains, competes, and wins—even against people without disabilities. And he does it all with help from Bobb, his strong and ever-ready service dog, specially trained for mobility assistance.

Bobb helped him move past the anger and grief surrounding the accident and loss of mobility. His dog is there when Dave switches out his prosthetic legs—he

Dogs of Destiny
 Watch Dave and Bobb together on “Something to Prove” at GuideDogs.org/DogsofDestiny



has several, depending on the sport. Bobb helps Dave climb stairs—or mountains. “Stepping between large rocks with a fake foot is tricky,” Dave says about their trek up a 15,000-foot mountain. “I was able to put a hand on him for balance.” Bobb waits patiently until Dave reaches the end of the lap pool. And when he falls, this remarkable dog helps Dave get back up again.

“People ask, ‘What are you proving—who are you proving it to?’” Dave explains, then answers his own question. “I’m proving it to me—that I can be as close to the way I was before this injury—regardless of these ‘things,’ these prosthetics.”

This courageous team conquered Manhattan, Brooklyn, Jersey City, Miami, San Diego, Charleston, Newport, Colorado, Texas, and more. “He’s amazing,” Dave says. Since the injury, Dave placed first in the international St. Anthony’s Triathlon, explored cliffs and glaciers in remote Alaska, came in first in an underwater navigation course, sailed with the USA sailing team, and completed an 8K Navy SEAL-designed obstacle course.

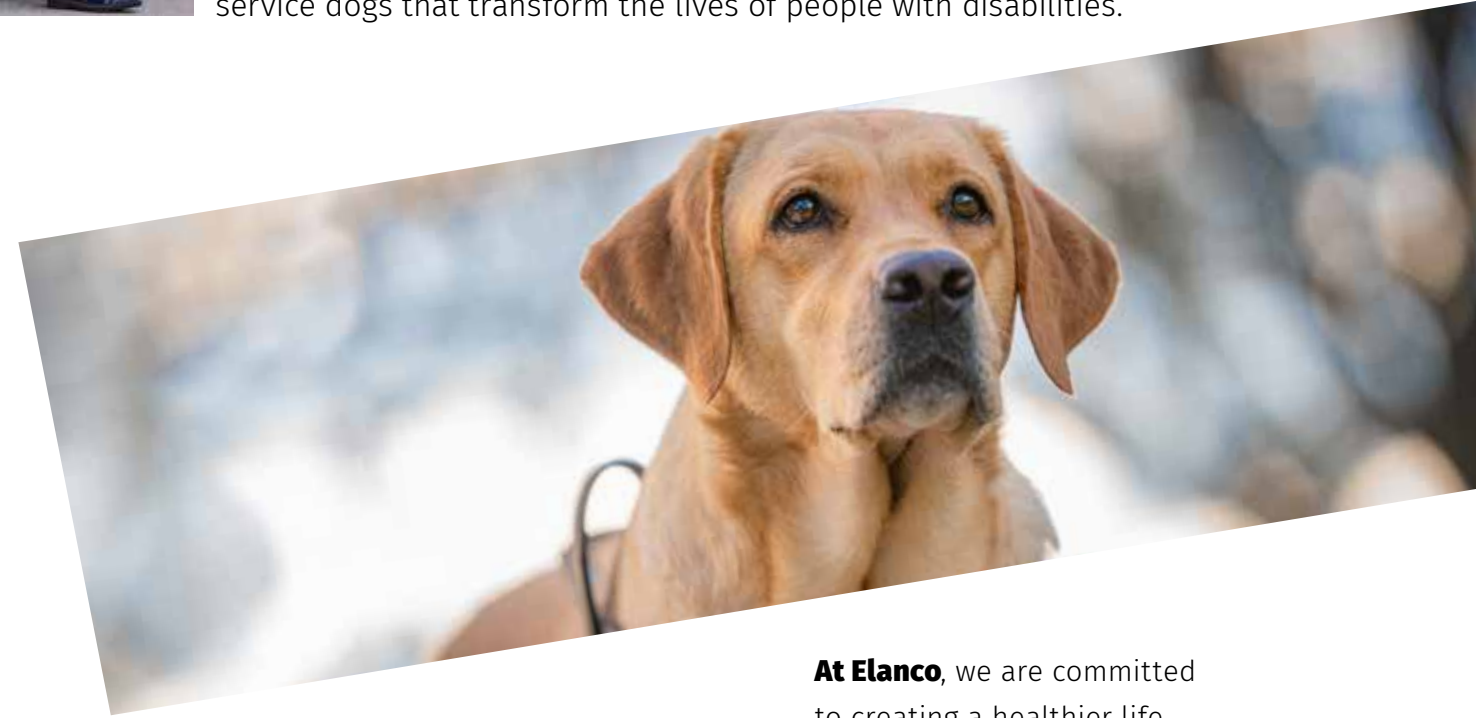
And Bobb rarely leaves his side.

“Bobb is fearless,” Dave says. “He’s steady. He’s very intelligent and impressive. But then he can have a little bit of attitude, where if I give him a set cue, he does it because he wants to. I’m lucky I got a dog as smart as him, and he’s my favorite type—the one with a little bit of attitude. I guess I have attitude too. We’re a good match.” ●



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