

ISSUE 10  
**Life**  
**UNLEASHED**

southeastern  
guide dogs inc



# Finding Peace

U.S. Navy Veteran  
Jessica Rhein and  
Service Dog Spencer

One mission  
of new  
**FREEDOM**

A **SOFT**  
**PLACE**  
to turn

Sails set  
for a journey  
of **HOPE**

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## from our CEO

Dear friend,

The mission of a lifetime takes the right paws to fill. Strong enough to carry the burdens. Yet gentle enough to comfort a child and bring peace to a home. A furry head to nuzzle on a lap and kind eyes to soothe a broken heart.

An assignment so great takes extraordinary dogs to fulfill. For the veterans in isolation, the families struggling with loss, and the ones awaiting their soldier to come home. They look to our dogs—they count on their mission.

And as these impressive companions carry out missions of their own, they give new meaning—new missions—to the ones who never thought they'd see hope.

No matter the past, the trouble of the present, or the unknowns of the future—because of you, these dogs devote their lives to a higher calling. The mission of a lifetime.

Thank you for supporting their journeys, every step of the way.

Warm regards,

*Titus Herman*

Titus Herman  
Chief Executive Officer



# MAKE A LASTING DIFFERENCE

The Southeastern Guide Dogs Inc **Cornerstone Society** is an exceptional community of like-minded friends. Members make a profound impact on our mission through a multi-year commitment.

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Enjoy exclusive events and other benefits. Join at [GuideDogs.org/CS](http://GuideDogs.org/CS) or call **941.729.5665**.

# Life UNLEASHED

ISSUE 10

A publication of  
Southeastern Guide Dogs Inc

Our extraordinary dogs transform lives throughout the country—at no cost to recipients. What makes our pups so special? Top-notch pedigrees. And countless hours of training and love. These highly skilled wonders turn darkness into light for people with vision loss. Restore freedom for veterans. Heal broken hearts for children struggling with loss. And they never ask for anything in return. Neither do we. We offer our clients their loyal friends, expert instruction, and lifetime support completely free of charge—thanks to big-hearted donors and volunteers.



4210 77th St E. | Palmetto, FL 34221  
guidedogs.org | 941.729.5665

## from our board chair

Dear Supporter,

Every veteran embodies bravery, sacrifice, and unwavering commitment. Their dedication to protecting our freedoms is often recognized with heartfelt words. A thank you.

But our gratitude isn't just a gesture—it's a lifeline. As my fellow Southeastern Guide Dogs Inc board member, Vice Admiral Joe Maguire, says: "If you really want to thank a veteran for their service, donate and do something that's going to be tangible and make a difference."

Because of your generous support, our gratitude is put into action. It's love on a mission. Hope set in motion. Your loyalty to the extraordinary dogs here does something special that changes lives—changes the world.

Thank you for your dedication to our dogs who fulfill their loving commitment to veterans, their families, and all who need them most.

Sincerely,

Tim Griffy  
Board Chair, Southeastern Guide Dogs Inc



### 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:**

- Tim Griffy** Chair, Richardson, TX
- Vice Admiral Joe Maguire, USN (Ret.)** Vice Chair, Austin, TX
- Andy Taylor** Treasurer, Lakeland, FL
- Katharine Saunders** Secretary, St. Petersburg, FL
- Drew Asher** Tampa, FL
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- Bobby Newman** Tampa, FL
- Carol Sanders** Bradenton, FL
- Dr. Harris Silverman** Sarasota, FL

### Mission Advancement Council

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:**

- John Whitcomb** Chair, Tampa, FL
- Carol Sanders** Vice Chair, Bradenton, FL
- Philip & Carol Beauchamp** Belleair, FL
- Paula Cummings** St. Petersburg, FL and Sturgeon Bay, WI
- Leo & Trish Eineker** Bradenton, FL
- Colleen Flaherty** Parrish, FL
- George & Mary Graner** Placida, FL
- Kathy Pou** Lakeland, FL
- Susan & John Rapp** Lakewood Ranch, FL
- Brian & Sherry Soucy** Canton, GA



# SAILING WITH SULLY

From diving in darkness to sailing in the sun.

## U.S. Navy Veteran Ed Burton and Guide Dog Sully

The dark depths of the sea—a place of preparation and foreshadowing. Navy Sailor Ed Burton started his 28 years of service as a diver. His rigorous training included diving with blacked-out glasses, a tactic meant to prepare him for duty. He never expected it to train him for everyday life.

When he left the Navy, he returned to a world of darkness. His vision gone. A reminder of the life-long effects of his time in Vietnam. “I always say that

the Navy trained me to be blind,” Ed says. He navigated life with a cane, brushing off the many suggestions to get a guide dog. You’ll be happier; you’ll have more independence, his wife, Betty, assured him.

*I’ll be fine,* Ed thought. He hoped.

Until the day he stepped off that sidewalk. The moment everything changed. His cane tapped the ground, finding no objects. Silence. Time to cross. Ed stepped onto the road and was instantly

*“Sully is a powerful, compact little sports car. She’s more petite than my predecessor dogs. But she’s got more power. I think I’ve got the Alfa Romeo sports car model now.”*

“As soon as I met my first guide dog, I thought, I should have done this a long, long time ago.”

hit by a car, suffering a broken leg. Through months of physical healing, he knew without a doubt that a guide dog would not only bring him happiness, but safety.

That’s when Ed’s journey with Southeastern Guide Dogs Inc began, almost 20 years ago. “As soon as I met my first guide dog, I thought, I should have done this a long, long time ago,” Ed says. Now, his third life-changing companion and guide, Sully, leads the way.

“It’s pure magic how these dogs are matched with me to perfection,” Ed says. Freedom to venture through life, and a burden lifted from his wife who now finds comfort in knowing Ed has independence with Sully. Whether cruising on the sailboat or lounging on the dock, they sail the seas of life, together.

“When I wake up each morning, it still may be dark for me, but with my wife and Sully,” Ed says, “I think . . . okay, I can survive another day. Life hasn’t stopped.” ■



HERITAGE SOCIETY

Generosity can live forever.

Join our Heritage Society by including Southeastern Guide Dogs Inc in your will, and leave a legacy that lasts.

Learn more at [GuideDogs.org/HS](http://GuideDogs.org/HS)



Christina Wills & Service Dog Nick

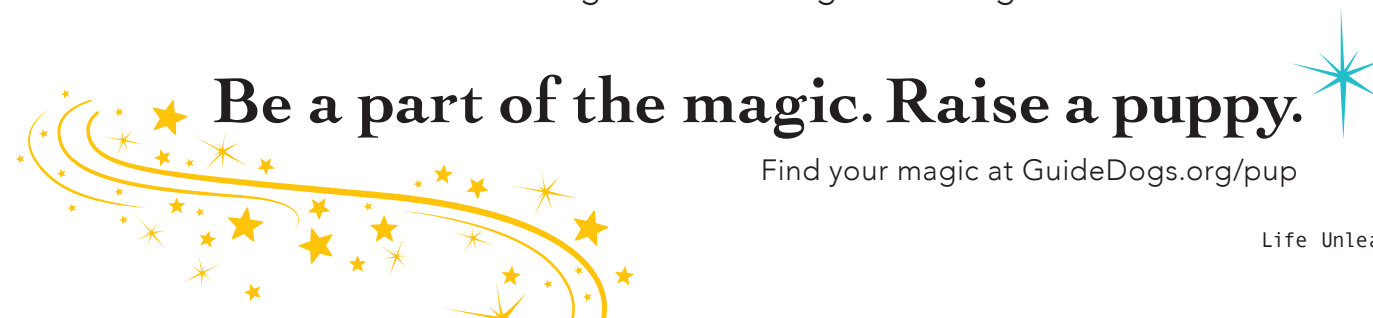
What’s your magic number?



Take me home for 3, 6, or 12 months. Love me forever.

Become a puppy raiser with Southeastern Guide Dogs Inc and open a world of magic to those with vision loss, veterans with disabilities, and children who need a best friend.

**Your mission as a puppy raiser is simple.** Take home a cuddly bundle of joy and bring back a happy, socialized, well-mannered dog. That’s the magic of making a difference.



Be a part of the magic. Raise a puppy.

Find your magic at [GuideDogs.org/pup](http://GuideDogs.org/pup)

# FINDING THE

U.S. NAVY VETERAN

JESSICA RHEIN AND

SERVICE DOG SPENCER

Keep it all in. Don't show the emotions that are bubbling up inside, threatening to spill over into a downward spiral. U.S. Navy veteran Jessica Rhein trained herself to dismiss the pain. Ignore the darkness that lurked in her mind from years at sea.

Her mission: to protect civilian ships moving through heavily pirated waters. Serving seven years with the Navy's military police, Jessica didn't have time to process emotions or fears. Sailing throughout the Middle East and around the world, she remained focused on protecting the people and supplies onboard as they navigated treacherous waters.

And when she left her duties at sea, Jessica found herself stranded in a world where nothing made sense. Lost. Drowning in the feelings that she buried beneath the crashing waves for years. Post-traumatic stress and debilitating back pain reminding her of the days spent focusing on protecting others—and never herself.



# SHORE

*A Rescue  
from the  
Waves  
of Emotion*





“I thought I was just going to get a service dog. Take your dog and go.

But instead, it was ...

welcome to new life.”

Jessica needed to know it was okay to let her thoughts and emotions reach the surface. But she couldn't find the light through the pressure of pain. She needed someone to show her the way.

Service dog Spencer walked into her life with a gentle nudge that said it's time; it's time to let it all out. His intuition perfectly in tune with Jessica's feelings, pulling her from the pit of haunting memories.

“He likes to lay up against me and pressure point his body on mine,” she says. “I need it. And I didn't even realize I needed that until I had Spencer.”

Now as a mom to three sons under the age of 10, Jessica continues to put others before herself. But Spencer keeps a

watchful eye and open heart, caring for his person, reminding her when it's time to breathe a sigh of relief and let out the emotions that spent so many years trapped in darkness.

“I went through intense therapy for PTSD, so I thought that had opened my eyes,” Jessica says. “But I wasn't nearly as aware as I am now, with Spencer.”

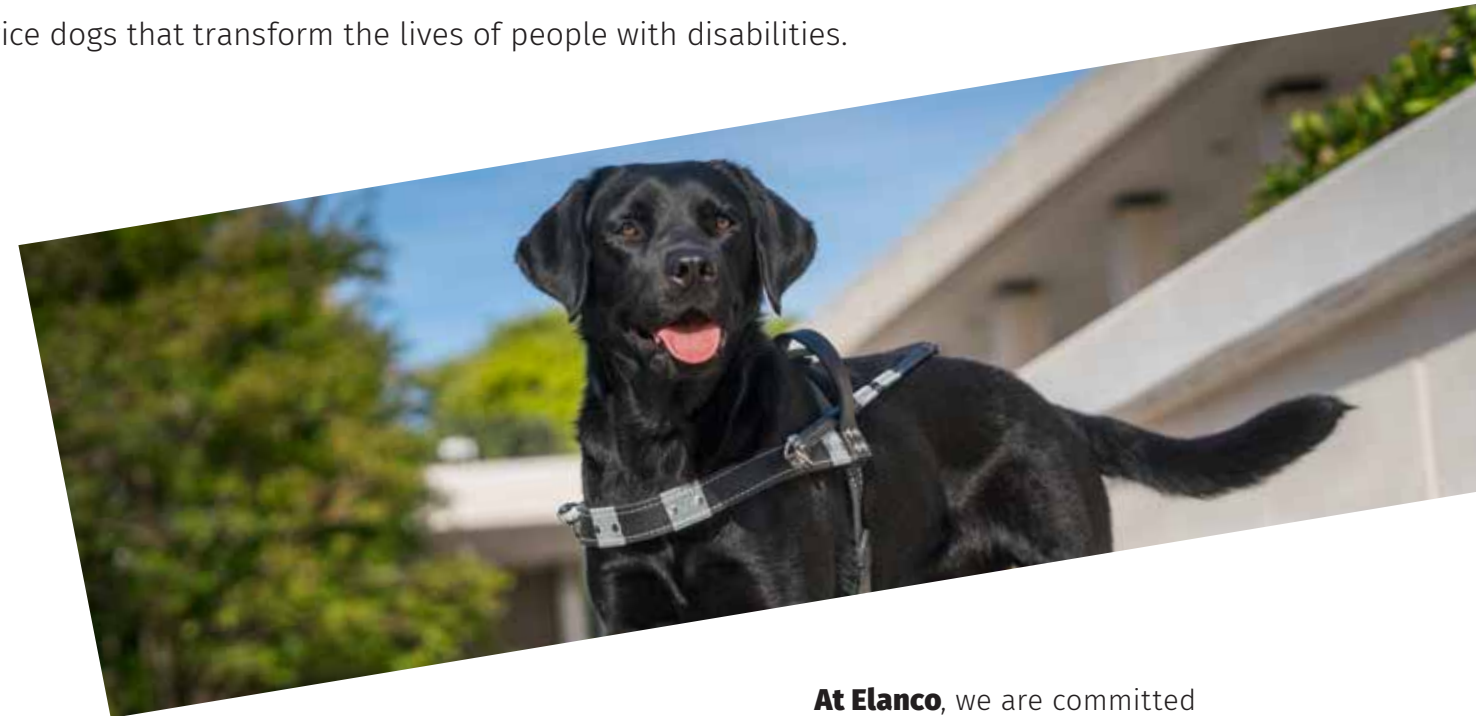
If Jessica tries to dismiss her emotions, Spencer's snuggle says we're feeling this, together. Pay attention because *you* matter. To me.

And though he never saw the horror at sea or felt the physical effects of Jessica's years of service, he knows the way to bring her emotions to shore—into the light where joy, hope, and newfound freedom offer a breath of fresh air. ■



## Elanco is proud to be the Official Sponsor of Preventative Health Products for Southeastern Guide Dogs Inc

We support long and healthy lives for the incredible guide dogs and service dogs that transform the lives of people with disabilities.



**At Elanco**, we are committed to creating a healthier life for animals everywhere. That means a more comprehensive portfolio of products along with unparalleled service and support for the health of animals, and for the good of people and the planet. **Elanco Healthy Purpose™**



# Abbie

A New Day  
with

One single day has the power to alter a lifetime; to change everything. An icy January in 2019—a day everything stood still for one family stationed in Homer, Alaska.

A beautiful family. A tragic loss. Years of memories built together put to a sudden halt, in one instance of finality. Devoted husband and father of four, Michael, died in an accident while on duty with the Coast Guard where he served for over 17 years as a chief warrant officer.

The memories of being a family of six held with precious care in their hearts as Brie felt the anguish of losing her high school sweetheart. Her friend, her husband. And the innocence of childhood snatched from their four children, each walking the path of grief—a long, winding road with unseen turns . . . all mapped out in an instant.



Hope  
grows  
where  
love  
shines





A new day dawns when Gold Star Family dog Abbie gallops into their home as a grand surprise to all the kids, proving that life still holds wonderful, unexpected joys. Bright moments. Smiles that grow like flowers in early spring, breaking through the chill and spreading warmth.

"Abbie senses when the kids are having an anxious moment," Brie says. "She draws close to them in these times and will join them on the couch to snuggle."

Fitting right into the family, Abbie loves the mornings she's sent upstairs on a special mission—to wake her favorite people up for school. Up the stairs she goes, bounding into beds, quickly "forgetting" her assignment to nudge them awake, as she finds a cozy spot to snooze, nestled in the blankets.

With each fresh sunrise comes another step forward as this family takes life day by day—Abbie's loving presence cuddling close, offering a soft place to turn amidst such hard loss. ■

**Abbie** senses when the kids are having an anxious moment. She draws close to them in these times."



# Simply Noted

Dear Friends,

I want to express my deep gratitude for what Southeastern Guide Dogs Inc has done for my life, personally.

After serving in the Air Force, my husband Morgan found a new mission with his first service dog, Foley, nine years ago. Our time with Foley has been a priceless gift. Foley gave Morgan the encouragement to keep going when he wanted to give up. And Foley brought stability, laughter, and peace of mind to our family during a critical time.

Watching Foley retire was incredibly difficult, but it helped to know that he'd get the rest he needs, and Southeastern Guide Dogs Inc would provide Morgan with another extraordinary service dog.

It wasn't long before we welcomed service dog Donzi into our family. Morgan says that Donzi already knows him better than Morgan knows himself!

The hours of training, love, and care that Donzi's puppy raisers and instructors gave him shine through in his perfect blend of puppy curiosity and strong work ethic. Donzi improves Morgan's quality of life, bringing immeasurable comfort to our family.

I can't let another day go by without thanking the entire Southeastern Guide Dogs Inc family for making this possible.

With gratitude,

Amber



Amber, Morgan, Foley, and Donzi



Morgan, Foley, and Donzi



# MILLION DOLLAR HEROES CHALLENGE



## SALUTE THEIR SERVICE

and help us meet the \$1,000,000 **HEROES CHALLENGE**



To the mother clinging to a photo of her son in uniform, wishing to hear his voice just one more time.

For the soldier returning from combat, battling anxious thoughts and haunting memories.

And to the longing loved ones, waiting and hoping for their heroes' return.

You're not alone.

Our dogs extend a comforting paw and warm embrace to veterans and military families. A steady presence that brings solace. A loyalty that rekindles hope.

Thanks to your support, our dogs become faithful companions to those who sacrifice so much. They carry the sound of laughter, paint smiles with the wag of a tail, and calm restless hearts—all because of your kindness.

### ★ **DOUBLE YOUR GIFT**

During the Heroes Challenge, your donation doubles, supporting our pups who help America's heroes and their families.

**Every dollar you give is matched up to \$1,000,000.**

#### *The Heroes Council*

Thank you to our Heroes Council, a group of friends who put veterans first by coming together to create our \$1,000,000 Heroes Challenge. Because of their generosity, your gift goes twice as far.

★ **Heroes Council Chairman:** Vice Admiral Joe Maguire, USN (Ret.)

#### *Heroes Council Members*

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Estate of Eddie F. Bird

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The Davis Elkins Charitable Foundation

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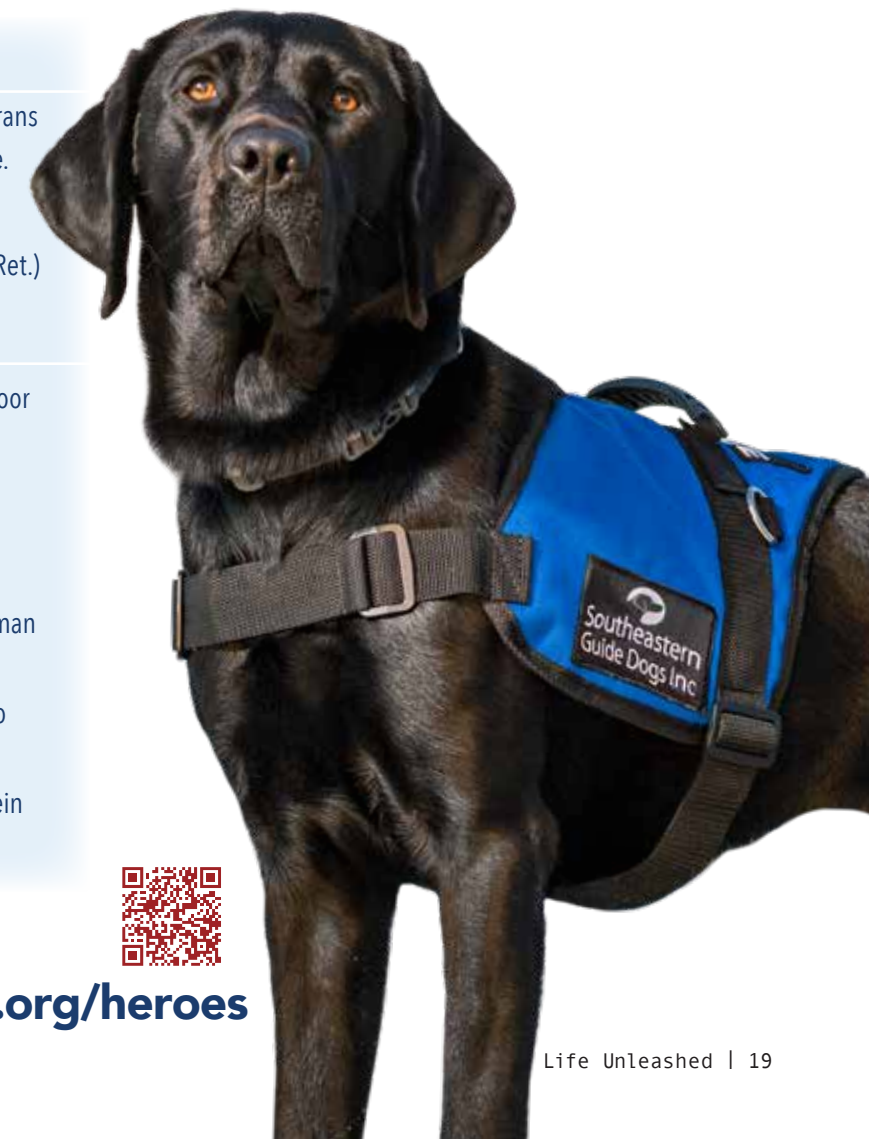
Brian & Sherry Soucy

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