

GUIDE DOG NEWS

2021
ISSUE 4



*BRIELLE WILBOURNE WITH BRITTANY,
AND JOSH SCHULTZ WITH NEYMAR*



**Guide Dogs
for the Blind**



Guide Dogs for the Blind

A NON-PROFIT,
CHARITABLE
ORGANIZATION

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Guide Dogs for the Blind follows the guidelines recommended by the Council of U.S. Dog Guide Schools and the International Guide Dog Federation for the humane care and training of our dogs, and the instruction and services offered to our clients.

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On occasion, GDB will share donor information with like-minded non-profit organizations to better fulfill our mission. If you do not want your information shared, please email us at donations@guidedogs.com.



Please recycle
this newsletter!

GREETINGS FROM THE CEO

Greetings!

I hope you and your loved ones are enjoying the holiday season. During this time of year, I am especially thankful for all you do to help our clients achieve their dreams. Whether you are a donor, puppy raiser, campus volunteer, breeder custodian or foster volunteer, you are changing lives!

Recently, GDB was proud to co-sponsor a California law that cracks down on fraudulent service animals while protecting public access rights for people with legitimate service dogs like guide dogs. We believe the law will serve as a model for other states to enact policy reforms that protect and serve our clients throughout the US.

On a personal note, I am thrilled and honored to be elected to the board of the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF). The IGDF is the world's largest membership organization of guide dog schools, whose members' purpose is to train and provide guide dogs for people who are blind or have low vision around the globe. I look forward to my leadership role on the global stage to improve mobility, inclusion, and independence for people who are blind or visually impaired.



Looking Ahead

Our plans for GDB next year are bold. Your continued support will help GDB:

- Train the world's premier guide dogs to serve more people
- Enable more clients to achieve their full potential through expansion of our Guide Dog, Orientation & Mobility Immersion, and K9 Buddy programs
- Introduce more youth who are blind or visually impaired to the guide dog lifestyle
- Serve as an innovative global leader in creating more inclusive communities

Because of you, our team is ready for 2022. Together, we are unstoppable!

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christine'.

Christine Benninger
President and CEO

GDB'S VETERINARY STAFF GAIN FEAR FREE CERTIFICATION

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT



GDB VETERINARIAN DR. ALEXANDRA PHILIPPINE EXAMINES A DOG THAT IS HAPPILY ENJOYING A PEANUT BUTTER TREAT FROM REGISTERED VETERINARY TECHNICIAN ALEX LEE.

If your dog gets anxious during a visit to the vet, it's probably something you've come to accept.

Whether your dog is a pet or a service animal, you may have heard about "fear free" veterinary practices and wondered what this meant. The term refers to the Fear Free Certification Program for veterinary clinic workers and is aimed at reducing fear, anxiety, and stress in animals, thereby creating an elevated experience for everyone involved, including dogs, handlers, owners, and veterinary professionals.

"We're proud to become the first Guide Dog School in North America to acquire fear free certification for all of GDB's veterinary staff members on both the California and Oregon campuses," says GDB's Medical Director Dr. Kate Kuzminski.

Getting certified is an immersive process that trains professionals to reduce or remove anxiety triggers that can cause pets to become fearful at home, in transport, at veterinary hospitals, or clinics. GDB hopes to lead the way to influence more veterinarians who treat guide dogs and service animals to become Fear Free certified, while also creating a better overall experience for dogs and human clients.

Shannon Delahunty, GDB's Veterinary Clinic Manager says the Fear Free training not only helps GDB's clinical practices, but gives our team the tools to educate and empower GDB's clients to use the same strategies in the daily care and handling of their dogs. "These tools ensure that dogs will have a positive experience throughout the process of receiving care, and allow our staff, volunteers, and clients to build trust beyond the veterinary exam."

Dr. Kuzminski says strengthening the human-dog bond is paramount for everyone at GDB. "The bond between a guide dog and a person who is blind or visually impaired is so profound that it's hard to compare it to any other kind of relationship," she said. "Guide dogs are meticulously trained and socialized

to safely guide their handlers through the complexities of pedestrian travel. Any part of a guide dog's daily experience that is anxiety provoking can impede the success of the partnership."

GDB's veterinary team was already supporting a positive clinic experience for our dogs, but Dr. Kuzminski says the formal Fear Free training has led the team to consider other ways to improve all aspects of the veterinary experience. "The Fear Free Certification Program has had a positive impact on GDB's veterinary practice, while helping to further deepen the culture of care and leadership that fuels our life-changing mission," explains Dr. Kuzminski. That's not only fearless, but priceless.



"The Fear Free initiative is completely in line with GDB's philosophy of focusing on positive reinforcement for training dogs. Every interaction is important to a guide dog's ultimate success, including vet visits."

—GDB's Director of Medicine, Dr. Kate Kuzminski

FEAR FREE CERTIFICATION HAS HELPED GDB:

- Develop better skills to deal with dogs that are nervous at the vet.
- Provide a framework for onboarding new employees and a consistency for how everyone treats patients in the clinic.
- Use more proactive pre-visit pharmaceuticals for dogs that may be feeling anxiety coming into the clinic.
- Plan for longer prep time (and more treats!) for dogs that need slower handling to adjust to the clinic.
- Strengthen the human-dog bond for clients, puppy raisers, breeder custodians, and foster care providers in their homes as staff pass along stress-reducing techniques in pre- and post-clinic visits.



BRIELLE AND BRITTANY

TEENS TRAINING CLASS LEADS TO LASTING FRIENDSHIP

Your support impacts the lives of people of all ages and all walks of life, including young people who are looking forward to futures bright with promise. Just ask Josh and Brielle, who became fast friends while undergoing guide dog training on our California campus. The duo were part of a class of teen clients.

17-year-old Brielle loves life with her guide dog, *Brittany*, who “makes everything a lot easier.” Brielle wants to become a teacher so she can teach children who are blind or visually impaired. “It will be interesting for younger children to see a little bit of the guide dog lifestyle, how it worked out for me, and how they could consider a guide dog for their future.” She also expressed her gratitude to GDB. “They really work hard to determine what each person needs.”

16-year-old Josh always knew he wanted to go to GDB for guide dog training. His mother attended GDB in 1995 to train with her first guide dog and is currently partnered with her third

GDB guide dog. Her success through the years gave Josh the confidence he needed to take that step.

Josh says his guide dog, *Neymar*, has been “amazing” and has given him a lot of confidence. Before Josh began working with *Neymar*, going up and down stairs with his white cane was challenging. *Neymar* has changed all of that. “Now I go up and down stairs with ease. He makes it so easy. That’s a big, positive change for me.”

Josh meanwhile, praised Chef Baptiste Pierru’s food. “The Hawaiian cream cheese pizza was amazing.” When asked what his guide dog’s favorite subject at school will be, Josh replied with a smile, “Lunch!”



**JOSH AND
NEYMAR**

DONATE TO CREATE POWERFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Donate through December 31st and
your gift will go twice as far!

One of our most generous supporters,
Leslys Garrow Vedder, will MATCH
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to \$100,000!

YOUR GIFT WILL BE DOUBLED!

▶ \$50 = \$100

Helps pay for initial vaccines and
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Goes toward a “Puppy Raising
Kit” for a volunteer puppy raiser.

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for one student to and from class
at one of our campuses.

▶ \$500 = \$1,000

Assists with sending one child to
Camp GDB.

*Please use the enclosed donation
envelope or donate online at
[guidedogs.com/newsgift](https://www.guidedogs.com/newsgift)*

GUIDE DOG HELPS PROFESSOR COMMUNICATE IN NEW WAYS

As a professor with a Ph.D. in communication ethics, Melba Vélez-Ortiz prided herself on her excellent communications skills. But her partnership with her guide dog *Chad* taught her to communicate in entirely new ways.

Melba learned about the benefits of a guide dog after moving to Grand Rapids, Michigan to teach at Grand Valley State University. A counselor whose father received his guide dog from GDB helped Melba learn about the enhanced benefits a guide dog could provide, however that meant facing her longtime fear of dogs.



**MELBA VÉLEZ-ORTIZ
AND CHAD**

“The whole experience for me was life changing. So intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually my training at GDB was by far the most complete educational experience I’ve ever had because I had to overcome my fear of dogs and learn to connect with another species that doesn’t use speech to communicate.”

A tenured professor, Melba’s work is rooted in communication, culture, disability, and ethics. A bold and vocal bi-lingual communicator, Melba has created programs surrounding communication and culture, authored books, published articles in peer-reviewed journals, and presented papers at conferences in her field. Driven by a philosophy developed by José Vasconcelos called “Happy Pessimism,” Melba accepts her blindness. She doesn’t expect things to be amazing, but she expects to work her hardest to make whatever

change is possible. She credits *Chad*, for giving her the enhanced “confidence and freedom” she had been yearning for.

Melba identifies herself as “a person who opens doors” for others who work hard to achieve their goals, and she brings this enthusiasm to GDB’s Alumni Board as a member of the Board. “Conversations with Melba are always thought-provoking, uplifting, and exciting,” says Theresa Stern, GDB’s VP of Outreach, Admissions, and Alumni.

Melba says she is “eternally indebted to every single donor” at GDB and everyone in GDB’s entire community. “Guide Dogs for the Blind is not only wildly successful, which is a testament to how well it is run, it invests in programs that change people’s lives—and not just client’s lives but the lives of those who raise guide dog puppies, foster dogs, and volunteer on campus.” She keeps in touch with *Chad’s* puppy raisers and was particularly touched when they reached out to see how she and *Chad* were faring during the height of the pandemic. “*Chad* loves a challenge. He loves his job of getting me safely from point A to point B. He missed being on a busy college campus and my students missed seeing him.”

Now back in the classroom, Melba says Professor *Chad* is once again in his element. *Chad* earned his doctorate when Melba was awarded tenure. Both their photos hang in a display case that reads: Meet your professor. “When students see *Chad’s* photo, they know there’s a special partnership between a human and an animal that’s magical and they get to experience this magic,” says Melba. “He’s the master teacher here. I just walk beside him.”



“We’ve got quite the partnership going. We’re a walking billboard for what’s possible, and I couldn’t ask for a bigger privilege.”

—Melba Vélez-Ortiz

Photos by Valerie Hendrickson (opposite) and Amanda Pitts (above); University Communications/Grand Valley State University

REMEMBERING DONOR AND VOLUNTEER WALLIS SMITH

Wallis “Wally” Smith did things her way. She was always smiling, upbeat, tenacious, and very funny. Some might say she was one of the most unique, dedicated, and generous persons they have ever met. Wally passed away in early September at the age of 83, but her legacy will live on in the memories of our community, as well as in the form of a generous estate gift she left to GDB.

In 2020, Wally celebrated 30 years of volunteering at GDB. She was part of the “Thursday Ladies” group who socialized puppies every Thursday when she wasn’t traveling.

Wally loved socializing her young charges and made a point to leave her endearing mark—a bright colored red or fuchsia-colored kiss mark—on every puppy’s forehead she came across. It didn’t take long for people to label these colorful marks as “Wally Whoppers.”

“It was her special mark,” says Chris Benninger, President and CEO of GDB, noting that Wally was a generous long-time donor and Legacy Society member who wholeheartedly believed in GDB’s mission.



“While we will miss seeing Wally’s smiling face and her trademark ‘Wally Whoppers,’ her legacy gift will help future puppies receive the love, attention, support, and training they need to become guide dogs that change people’s lives.”

—President and CEO Chris Benninger

SAVE THE DATE

80TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION CANINE HEROES GALA

October 29, 2022 (San Francisco)

Info at [guidedogs.com/events](https://www.guidedogs.com/events)



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THANK YOU TO OUR NEW & CONTINUED SUPPORTERS July 1-September 30, 2021

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Recognizing the vision of those who have included GDB in their estate plans.

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HOW DO I MAKE A GIFT TO GDB IN MY WILL OR TRUST?



“We reached out to GDB’s Planned Giving team for assistance in naming Guide Dogs for the Blind in our trust. As GDB’s VP of Admissions, Outreach, and Alumni, I know how important the Legacy program is to the future of the organization. It provides lasting, significant funding for programs so that future generations of people can benefit just as I have.”

—Theresa Stern, pictured with her guide dog, Wills, husband, Craig, and retired GDB breeder dog, Atrus

Three easy ways to include GDB in your will or trust:

- Let us know that you are interested in making a gift in your will or trust: 800.295.4050, ext. 4073 (Joan Scott) or ext. 4169 (Tom Horton).
- Visit [guidedogs.com/planned-giving](https://www.guidedogs.com/planned-giving) for sample bequest language.
- Send us the completed coupon below.

GDB CHARITABLE ESTATE PLANNING

- I have already included Guide Dogs for the Blind in my estate plan. I accept the invitation to be recognized as a member of the Legacy Society.
- Please send me suggested language to use in my will or trust.
- I would like to receive information about charitable gift annuities.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Return to:

**Joan Scott, Planned Giving
Guide Dogs for the Blind
P.O. Box 151200
San Rafael, CA 94915-1200**