

GUIDE DOG NEWS

2023
ISSUE 2



CHERI OWEN WITH
GUIDE DOG, MARTINEZ



Guide Dogs
for the Blind

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GREETINGS FROM THE CEO

Greetings,

Happy spring! After a wet winter on our California and Oregon campuses, it's nice to have some sunshine again. Spring is a time of new beginnings — something we experience every day at Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB). Puppies are born, guide dog teams are trained, K9 Buddies provide companionship to clients of all ages, and Orientation and Mobility Immersion clients gain new skills to live safe, independent lives.

None of this vital work would be possible without the support of our entire GDB community. A key component of this support begins with a financial investment from philanthropic supporters like the Hind Foundation and Travers Family Foundation. Their significant contributions have helped fund our Apprentice Training Program (pages 4-5) and Veterinary Care Program (pages 6-7), and we are so excited to see these programs grow and thrive thanks in large part to their support.

This philanthropic investment — and the ongoing support of our donors, volunteers, and staff — make a profound difference in both the lives of our clients and the dogs we breed and train to partner with them. Since we are 100% privately funded and receive no government support, we count on people like you to ensure that:

- GDB offers our clients a lifetime of care and support so they can continue to live more abundant, inclusive lives.
- Every guide dog and K9 Buddy is provided free of charge to our clients.
- GDB's dogs are lovingly bred, trained, and cared for throughout their entire lives, including financial support to our clients for veterinary care, as needed.
- GDB's services won't stop when our guide dog clients go home with a dog — we provide the most comprehensive follow-up care of any guide dog school to ensure that our teams are successful and can work safely together for as long as possible.

Thank you for all you do. Together, we are unstoppable!

With gratitude,

Christine Benninger

President and CEO



CHRISTINE
BENNINGER

TRAINING MORE INSTRUCTORS TO SERVE MORE CLIENTS

Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) is known throughout the world for our positive reinforcement-based Guide Dog Training Program that matches hundreds of dogs with clients every year. Fueling the program's success is GDB's Apprentice Training Program that teaches individuals to become qualified Guide Dog Mobility Instructors (GDMIs). During the three-year paid apprenticeship, apprentices undergo rigorous on-the-job training with mentor instructors and comprehensive academics in the core areas of guide dog training, client assessment, client training, and field support.

Apprentice Program Manager Amy Gunn says GDB developed the apprenticeship to ensure that GDB always has a pool of qualified instructors. "There are no trade schools, colleges, or universities that fully prepare individuals for the role, so we train and develop our own instructors," she says. "Training dogs to become guides is an extremely specialized, complex skill, and teaching clients who are blind or visually impaired how to partner with a guide dog requires an extensive, unique skillset." Instructors who complete the apprenticeship are among some of the best trained Guide Dog Mobility Instructors in the world.



Currently, a record 28 apprentices are in the program, with many expected to become qualified GDMIs by 2024. The program recently received a substantial philanthropic investment from the Hind Foundation to help ensure that GDB is fully staffed to support our goal of training 300+ guide dog teams a year. GDB currently supports approximately 2,000 guide dog teams throughout North America and has trained more than 16,000 teams in the past 80+ years.

ABOVE: DUALY-CERTIFIED GUIDE DOG MOBILITY AND ORIENTATION & MOBILITY INSTRUCTORS KELLY CHADWICK (L) AND AMY GUNN. KELLY IS GDB'S APPRENTICE PROGRAM O&M INSTRUCTOR AND TEACHES THE O&M MODULES OF THE APPRENTICESHIP. AMY IS THE APPRENTICE PROGRAM MANAGER AND OVERSEES THE PROGRAM CURRICULUM AND APPRENTICE TRAINING.

To round out their skillset and help meet more clients where they are, several of our GDMIs have also become certified in Orientation and Mobility (O&M) training. Rehabilitation Services Director Marc Gillard says GDB's free O&M Immersion Program helps clients who are blind or visually impaired gain the skills to safely travel with a cane or a canine. "Unfortunately, 40 percent of the people who apply for a guide dog lack these critical skills to qualify for our guide dog training program," says Marc. "Having more dually-qualified instructors on staff can help support GDB's O&M Immersion Program, enhance applicant assessment, and help support established teams with more complex O&M needs in the field."

To encourage more staff to become dually qualified, GDB recently launched an Educational Assistance Program for select guide dog mobility instructors throughout GDB to help cover tuition costs at an accredited university with an O&M program, as well as paid time to pursue the degree (typically a 15 to 24-month process). No other guide dog school in North America offers anything similar.



"Being a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor and O&M Specialist has enabled me to take a more holistic, comprehensive approach to my guide dog training and client services work. The O&M training I received in my master's program complemented the GDB apprenticeship in a beautiful way, and I feel well-equipped to work with the variety of people and dogs."

— Taelor Michehl, Certified O&M Instructor and Qualified Guide Dog Mobility Instructor



TAELOR MICHEHL

Marc says while GDMIs are trained to assess an individual applicant's readiness to train with a guide dog, O&M Specialists are proficient at holistically assessing physical issues and recognizing potential neurological or hearing impairments as well. "A dually-qualified GDMI can assess how these additional characteristics may impact a person's readiness for a guide dog," he says. "Most importantly, they can assess and address any O&M skill deficits affecting a client in the training moment. This program helps instructors expand their skillset, broadens GDB's employee talent pool, and helps us meet more clients' needs."

GIVING BACK: FOR THE HEALTH OF EVERY DOG

GDB's commitment to excellent veterinary care begins with each puppy's first checkup and continues throughout every working dog's journey. This dedication to the health and welfare of our dogs resonated with members of the Travers Family Foundation who recently funded a position for a new GDB staff veterinarian. "We believe that every GDB dog deserves to have the best medical care possible," says Elizabeth Travers. "Funding a new veterinary position to help carry out the organization's commitment to the health and wellness of its dogs made sense."



**GDB VETERINARIAN
DR. DIANA ALVAREZ**

The Travers have also funded the Travers Family Puppy Nursery in the Puppy Center on GDB's California campus. Nancy Travers Lucas says GDB's values align with those of her family. "Our love for dogs and our desire to help empower people who are blind or visually impaired are the reasons we continue to support GDB's important work."

Every year, GDB performs thousands of hours of general canine veterinary care as well as specialized and emergency operations to keep our dogs healthy, happy, and active. GDB Medical Director Dr. Kate Kuzminski says caring for GDB's puppies and dogs on our campuses is a 24/7 operation. "Having another full-time veterinarian helps us continue to provide

the best veterinary care as we grow our guide dog and K9 Buddy Programs." She says once a dog is paired with a client, maintaining the health of each program dog is critical to the overall success of a guide dog or K9 Buddy team. "That's why we are so committed to the health and well-being of all our working dogs for their entire lives," explains Dr. Kate.






GDB client Bruce Gilmour has experienced this commitment firsthand. He has had six guide dogs since 1985 and lives in Vancouver, British Columbia with his wife Wendy, his retired guide dog *Marley* and his current guide dog *Falina*. When *Marley* was still guiding, he developed a growth between his shoulder blades. Bruce contacted GDB for support and advice. "My vet and Dr. Erin Matern at GDB both recommended that the growth be surgically removed. That operation would have been a significant financial hit for me and I'm grateful GDB's Veterinary Financial Assistance (VFA) fund was there to help." Bruce praised Dr. Matern for her emotional support and technical expertise. "She was involved in every step of the way, communicating with me and my vet about what treatment she felt was necessary to help *Marley*," says Bruce. "*Marley* gave me the best years of his life. Even though he's retired from guiding, GDB continues to help pay for *Marley's* veterinary needs through the VFA Program. That says a lot about GDB's commitment to their guide dogs and their clients."

**GDB CLIENT BRUCE GILMOUR
WITH GUIDE DOG, FALINA, AND
RETIRED GUIDE DOG, MARLEY**



"GDB has been raising, training, and supporting these special dogs for 80+ years," explains Dr. Kate. "We never want cost to be a barrier to anyone who could benefit from a magical partnership with one of our dogs. With the ongoing support of our community, we look forward to continuing this life-changing work for many years to come."

YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT CHANGES LIVES!

-  **\$50** helps pay for a pup's initial vaccinations
-  **\$150** goes toward annual wellness checkups
-  **\$300** assists with the cost of a "Puppy Raising Kit" for a volunteer raiser
-  **\$500** helps pay for an ergonomic guide dog harness
-  **\$1,000** assists with the cost of urgent care procedures



CHERI OWEN AND HER GUIDE DOG, MARTINEZ, WITH MEMBERS OF THE UCSB WOMENS BASKETBALL TEAM

For GDB Alumni Board member Cheri Owen, having her guide dog, *Martinez*, in her life is a slam dunk. “My whole life has changed so much because of *Martinez*,” she says. “After he came into my life, I gained a new level of confidence. I feel like no matter where we go, we’re a team.”

And Cheri is no stranger to teamwork. She is a U.S. Air Force Gulf War veteran; a former athlete who played collegiate basketball and was a competitive power lifter. Before her retirement, she had a career as a features writer/editor for a power lifting magazine. These days, Cheri volunteers as a life coach and mentor to student athletes on the women’s basketball team at UC Santa Barbara, where her wife, Jenni Sorkin, is an art history professor. “I’m here to teach the athletes that there’s a whole life waiting for them once they’re done with their college sports career,” she says.

Cheri and *Martinez* are a steady presence at the practices and games, and *Martinez* is integral to her work with the team. “*Martinez* helps me show these young women athletes — and everybody in the Thunderdome — that blindness isn’t something that needs to be isolating. That you can be involved and be a part of the community and be everything that you want to be regardless of being blind or visually impaired.”

Cheri is grateful to GDB’s donors and volunteers. “You really have such a profound impact on people’s lives — it goes beyond what you can even imagine,” she says. “There’s not enough gratitude to go around. If you ever have a doubt if your support matters, it does. It makes a difference. It’s miraculous.”

To see a video featuring Cheri and *Martinez*, visit GDB’s YouTube channel, [guidedogsaregreat](#).

GDB Board Member Deborah Neff moved a lot when she was a kid. But she had her family and always had her dog and cat to comfort her while she adjusted to each new town. “I learned early on the importance of the human-animal bond.” That bond sparked her interest in being a long-time supporter and volunteer with GDB. Her family has had career change dogs, and more recently have been volunteer breeder custodians. Deb’s family currently share their lives with retired breeder *Josette*.

“During her time as a breeder and when we adopted *Josette* upon her retirement, I became truly aware of how amazing GDB is. Everyone who interacted with her was wonderful, including *Josette*’s puppy raisers who have become our close friends. The love and care that goes into every GDB puppy and program dog is so evident.”

As a consultant in the life sciences industry, Deborah helps build small biotech startups into global businesses. “I believe my experience working with startup companies will add value to GDB as it grows its revenue to serve more clients and serve them more broadly. “Like a startup, GDB is constantly evolving, changing, and adapting to meet its clients’ needs.”

Deborah says she’s fascinated with GDB’s initiatives that improve the health and well-being of our program dogs and the DNA research that analyzes large data sets of canine genetics, breeding, behavior, and medical traits to improve the success rates of our dogs.” She notes that GDB has made great strides in the last 80+ years, adding numerous programs for youth who are blind or visually impaired and an Orientation & Mobility Immersion Program to help clients gain skills to work with a cane or a guide dog. “I’m excited to be a part of all of this expansive work and help raise funds to support it as we grow our mission to serve more clients and to serve them more broadly.”



DEBORAH NEFF AND HER MOTHER, IRVA, WITH RETIRED GDB BREEDER DOG, JOSETTE



IN MEMORIAM: CHARLES N. TRAVERS

GDB Philanthropist Charles “Chuck” Travers passed away in April at the age of 87. Chuck loved dogs, believed deeply in our mission, and was committed to the health and welfare of animals. Through the Travers Family Foundation, Chuck and his family funded the Travers Family Puppy Nursery in our Puppy Center and recently funded a new veterinarian position on our California campus. “Chuck, and the entire Travers family, have been such wonderful supporters of our mission as well as dear friends,” says GDB CEO and President, Christine Benninger. “Because of Chuck and his family’s support, GDB has been able to lead the guide dog industry in the care of our puppies and dogs. Chuck truly will be missed!”

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- Watch a live graduation on our YouTube channel Youtube.com/@gdb_official/streams

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January 1, 2023-March 31, 2023

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1. Visit [guidedogs.com/plannedgiving](https://www.guidedogs.com/plannedgiving) for sample bequest language.
2. Let us know that you are interested in making a gift in your will or trust.
3. Send us the completed coupon below.

“My journey with GDB began when I met my friend Doris and her guide dog, *Kessler*. This started my love affair with the organization, which led to a charitable bequest in my will, a beneficiary designation in my 401(k), and twelve charitable gift annuities. GDB will always have a place in my heart. I am happy that my gifts will make its programs available for future generations of guide dog users.” — *Cindy Compton, GDB Legacy Society member pictured with her dog, Chloe.*



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.

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**Joan Scott, Planned Giving
Guide Dogs for the Blind
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