

Faithful FRIENDS



August 2025

News for you, a friend and supporter of Leader Dogs for the Blind

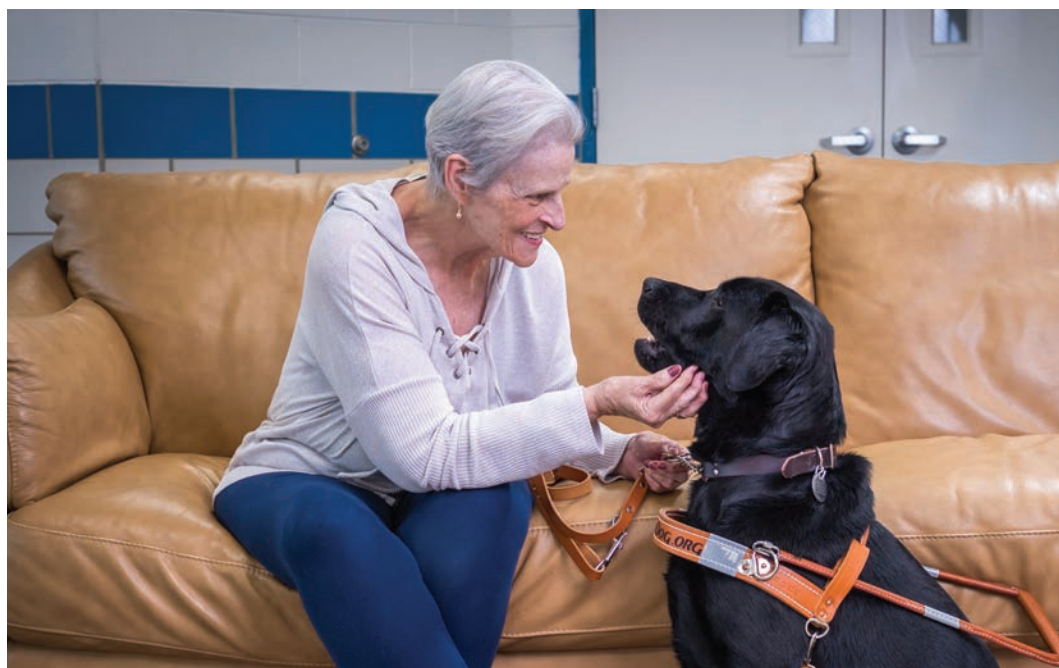
Our Volunteers are Pawsome!



Volunteers are a critical part of Leader Dogs for the Blind. It simply would not be possible to fulfill our mission without the hundreds of volunteers currently serving in our organization.

From the volunteer breeding hosts who are the first to welcome newborn Leader Dogs into the world, to the puppy raisers who get the dogs ready to navigate the world, to the on-campus Canine Support Assistants and client service volunteers, it takes a village of volunteers to help make our clients UNSTOPPABLE!

All About Volunteers



Leader Dog client Leanne is excited about the independence her Leader Dog will bring her, and the possibilities that come with it.

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FOLLOW THE LEADER



1039 S. Rochester Road
Rochester Hills, MI 48307
LeaderDog.org

Vision

Every person who is blind or visually impaired travels safely and independently.

Mission

Empowering people who are blind or visually impaired with lifelong skills for safe and independent daily travel.

Values

- Do what is right
- Show respect and compassion
- Demonstrate passion for the work
- Deliver a superior experience
- Work as a team
- Seek innovation
- Practice safety



Message from the President

Dear Leader Dog Community,

I am delighted to connect with you through this edition of our Faithful Friends newsletter. As we continue our journey at Leader Dogs for the Blind, I am constantly reminded of the incredible community that supports our mission. This community is built on the dedication and passion of our volunteers, who are the true heroes behind our success.

In this issue, we shine a spotlight on the incredible volunteers who support our mission. With just over 1,000 volunteers, their unwavering commitment and selfless contributions are the backbone of our organization. Each volunteer brings unique skills and a compassionate heart, making a profound impact on the lives of our clients and their Leader Dogs.

As you read through this edition, I hope you gain a deeper appreciation for the incredible work our volunteers do. Their dedication, passion and love are what make Leader Dogs for the Blind a beacon of hope and independence for so many. We are immensely grateful for their contributions and the positive impact they have on our community.

Thank you for being a part of our Leader Dog family. Your continued support and generosity make these incredible journeys possible. Together, we are transforming lives and creating opportunities for independence, confidence and companionship for visually impaired individuals.

Warm regards,

Melissa L. Weisse
President and CEO



Tune in to Taking the Lead every other Thursday. Our podcast welcomes guests from the blindness community who share stories, experiences and so much more! You can find Taking the Lead wherever you stream podcasts, on our website at LeaderDog.org/taking-the-lead or by scanning the QR code.

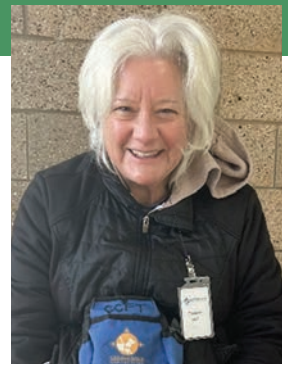


Volunteers Are All Over Campus!

In almost every area of our campus, volunteers can be found taking on a wide variety of positions. Volunteers may conduct tours, assist clients with tasks such as transportation and shopping, perform clerical work, provide enrichment time for our dogs in training, assist staff in the puppy area, produce media in Braille and audio, and help with events, among other things.

Sheila has been an on-campus volunteer for 14 years. She has served in many different roles in canine and puppy care. Here's what Leader Dog staff members had to say: *"Sheila pays close attention to each dog's mood and behavior and strives to make each dog feel loved and happy. She is kind and friendly, and accepts every person at Leader Dog whether they are an employee or a volunteer. She talks positively about the Leader Dog mission outside of her volunteer role."*

Sheila was one of the recipients of the 2024 Leader Dog Griffis Award, presented once a year to volunteers who demonstrate significant commitment to the work and the mission of Leader Dog. As an exceptionally long-serving, dedicated volunteer who lives the values of Leader Dog every day, Sheila deserves this prestigious recognition!



From Leader Dog Employee to Volunteer

After twelve years as an employee in Leader Dog's philanthropy department, Mike retired. Soon after, he realized just how much he missed being on the Leader Dog campus. So, what did he do? Sign up to volunteer, of course!

"I believe that our clients are the most courageous people I have ever met," Mike says. *"I cannot imagine crossing a busy street relying on a cane or a dog and my instincts."*

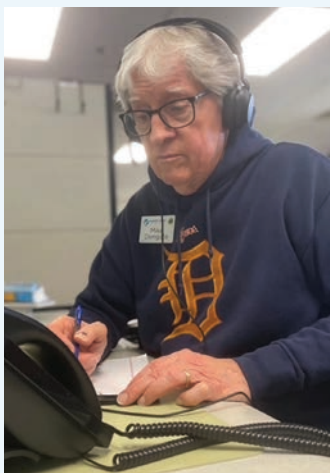
Mike, an active Lions Club Member, now serves in our client services department fielding phone calls from prospective and current clients. He helps with frequently asked questions, applications and other logistic questions or concerns.

Every Friday presents itself with another set of life-changing stories or moments with clients Mike feels privileged to talk to. *"While I would like to blame my watery eyes on the fluorescent lights in our department, I know it's the conversations I have with the amazing people we serve. The most frequent comment I get from new clients is, 'I wish I would have come to Leader Dog sooner.'"*

"I have always maintained that when I grew up, I wanted to be part of client services," says Mike. *"I'm not sure I have grown up, but I have achieved that goal. This is the most rewarding thing I have ever done."*

He continues: *"There is a common thread that runs through everyone who volunteers or donates to Leader Dog. It is an undeniable passion to empower people who are blind or visually impaired to travel safely and independently. If you share this passion, I encourage you to volunteer, donate or, better yet, do both."*

Thank you, Mike, for all you have done and continue to do for our clients!



Breeding Host and Puppy Raiser: Shannon



Shannon is a breeding host and puppy raiser, and she recently began training as a human guide volunteer. So far, she and her daughter have raised 19 puppies total.

"The Leader Dog organization has always been on my mind since I was a child because my dad had a friend whose son was blind," Shannon says. "I remember him donating to Leader Dog. Also, our daughter is a type 1 diabetic, and we understand how many different health conditions can impact vision."

Shannon's favorite part of the Leader Dog mission is the people she meets and the stories they tell. *"From the raiser who has raised 20 dogs, to the people you randomly talk to when you are out in public working with a puppy, to the trainers and their intense energy, to other breeding hosts and their experiences, to the retired veterinarian who volunteers on campus and to the clients who are matched with a dog."*

Shannon has a message for people who tell her they could never raise a puppy and then give the dog up: *"The most difficult things in life are the most rewarding and meaningful, and allow for the most growth as a human being. You will get to meet incredible people, whether it's staff at Leader Dog, raisers, breeding hosts or people who donate and support Leader Dog. And, you will have a connection to something very special."*

Legacy Giving with Carolyn

Carolyn was inspired to begin puppy raising in 1994, marking the start of an incredible commitment of service to others.



Since then, Carolyn has raised 36 puppies for Leader Dog. *"My most endearing moments are when I get to meet the clients that receive one of the puppies that I have raised," Carolyn says. "This helps me to witness the direct impact I have on this program and to stay motivated to continue."*

Carolyn has built a legacy of service, leaving a permanent mark on both the puppies she's raised and the individuals whose lives she's touched. To ensure that this important work continues for years to come, Carolyn has chosen to leave a gift in her estate plan to support Leader Dogs for the Blind.

"Since I can't raise puppies forever, I decided to include Leader Dog in my estate plan because I wanted to make sure that the Leader Dog mission would continue for generations to come," said Carolyn.

Carolyn's commitment creates a lasting legacy of kindness, service and empowerment that will have an impact on our clients' lives for many years to come.

To learn more about our Legacy Society, please reach out to Amy Bush, Director of Planned Giving, at 248.650.7108 or amy.bush@leaderdog.org.

Ways to Volunteer

Volunteers are crucial to the success of Leader Dogs for the Blind. Explore our volunteer options to see what's right for you!

Raise a Puppy - As a volunteer puppy raiser, you'll be the foundation a puppy needs to become a Leader Dog.



Host a Breeding Dog - Hosting a breeding dog is a unique opportunity that invites you to bring a mom or dad dog into your family for the length of their breeding career — and beyond!



Volunteer on Campus - Volunteers work throughout our campus, and off campus to support our philanthropy, client services, residential services, volunteer engagement, marketing and training staff.



For more information, please visit leaderdog.org/volunteer