

## **Harness & Leash**

### **Edition 32**

#### **Message from David Locklin, Director of Programs**

Looking back over the past year, the 80<sup>th</sup> for Leader Dog, I think of things that happen at LDB that clients never hear about. Every day our staff and volunteers are working to improve our programs and keep them funded—so we can continue to provide them to you for free!

Here are just a few of this year's happenings: introduced more training options for guide dog, and orientation and mobility clients, upgraded to the VictorReader Trek for our US and Canadian clients, launched online modules for our GDMI apprentice training, began holding quarterly webinars for people interested in learning more about our services and continued to build strong partnerships with corporations who support us.

As always, we include the contact information for our client services department several times in this newsletter. We do this so you know that client services is always your first point of contact. So here is the first mention, you can reach our client services department at 888-777-5332 or

[clientservices@leaderdog.org](mailto:clientservices@leaderdog.org).

## **New Annual Contact Policy**

We have recently developed a new annual contact policy for all clients. Once a year our field representatives will contact all active guide dog clients to find out how you and your dog are doing. They'll ask a few questions regarding how your dog is working and inquire if you have any concerns.

We are doing this to be more proactive and have contact with clients on a regular basis, so don't be surprised or alarmed when you get this call. We just want to provide support if it is needed.

Between calls, don't hesitate to contact our client services department at 888-777-5332 when you have questions or need assistance.

## **Grain-Free Diets by Kelly Wilson, DVM**

There have been many stories about grain free diets in the news lately. Why are people talking about it? Are grain free diets good or bad?

According to board certified veterinary nutritionists, "grain free" is purely a marketing term, it does not mean anything nutrition wise. Although some people have adverse reactions to gluten, there is no evidence that this occurs in dogs. However, some dogs develop adverse food reactions (hypersensitivities) to animal proteins in their food over time, usually from a protein that they have eaten consistently for a long time. When dogs develop food hypersensitivities or "allergies," people often look for new

protein sources to feed them to alleviate the issue. Dog food companies have done this and started marketing accordingly. Not only have they replaced traditional animal protein sources like chicken and beef with salmon and duck, but they have replaced cereal grains like corn, wheat and rice with legumes like chick peas, lentils and green pea. These food switches are made to appeal to people and are not necessarily beneficial to the health and nutritional needs of dogs. These products are often marketed as "allergy free" which is nonsense. Dogs can become allergic to any ingredient that they eat regularly, including salmon, duck or lentils. Since most food companies make a variety of food with different ingredients using the same machinery in their factories, there is a lot of cross contamination between products, so what's on the label is not always what is in the bag. A bag of fish and potato food may be contaminated with chicken and rice that was processed on the same machine!

Not only is the term "grain free" a marketing tactic, there is recent evidence that these diets may be creating unexpected and unusual health concerns for dogs. Dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) is a heart disease that causes enlarged heart chambers leading to irreversible congestive heart failure. In dogs, DCM can be inherited in certain breeds, such as Dobermans, boxers and standard schnauzers. In some dogs, DCM is due to a deficiency of taurine, an amino acid required for the development and function of the myocardium. Consequently, dogs may develop DCM on

taurine-deficient diets. Although grain free diets are not deficient in taurine, many dogs eating grain free are being diagnosed with DCM. This includes breeds such as Labrador retrievers and golden retrievers. Researchers believe that the connection could be due to low bioavailability of taurine or increased loss during digestion. The Adverse Event Review Team in the FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine Division of Veterinary Product Safety recently reported that 93% of the dog foods identified in the DCM reports listed peas, lentils or both among their first 10 ingredients, and 91% were grain free. It is suspected that the reasons for dogs developing DCM is complex, involving many factors in addition to their diet.

Until further research is done to determine the exact causes, we recommended that you choose a standard, not grain free, diet for your dog.

## **Celebration Ceremonies**

The celebration ceremonies that began with the first Guide Dog Training and O&M Training clients in July have been well received. During the ceremonies some of the clients shared a few words regarding their experience, while others sat back and enjoyed the stories of their peers.

All ceremony attendees had a great time celebrating the successful completion of training and began looking forward to

returning home to continue their journeys—either with their white cane or their Leader Dog.

We look forward to continuing this new tradition with all our future clients!

### **Client Facebook Group is Coming**

When in training at Leader Dog, many clients develop strong friendships and want to keep in touch after returning home. To make this easier, we will soon be launching a Facebook group open only to Leader Dog clients. This will be a great place to share stories and connect with people who have the same experiences as you. New clients will get to connect with veteran clients to find out what to expect when arriving at campus, what clothes to pack and other questions.

We will be contacting current clients via email when the Facebook group goes live, so please send client services an email to confirm that your email address is correct in our system. Contact them at [clientservices@leaderdog.org](mailto:clientservices@leaderdog.org).

### **LDB Gift Shop Offers Discount**

All clients now receive 15% off from our online gift shop. Enter code "15OFF" at checkout to claim your discount. If you have questions, contact Kim Thomas, gift shop coordinator, at 888-777-5332.

## **Contact Us by Phone, Email or Text**

Your first point of contact for assistance is always the client services department. You can reach them by calling 888-777-5332, or email or text them at [clientservices@leaderdog.org](mailto:clientservices@leaderdog.org).

## **Questions, Comments or Suggestions**

Please send comments to UpdateEditor@leaderdog.org or call 888-777-5332 ext. 1158.