



UPDATE

LEADERDOG.ORG | ISSUE 2 | 2023

LEADER DOGS FOR THE BLIND



Why Not Me?

Leader Dog Hero's Unique Journey

President & CEO Sue Daniels Retires



Farewell.

I am writing to let you know that I am retiring from Leader Dogs for the Blind in January. As my time with the organization comes to a close, I want to thank all of you for what has been a wonderful and gratifying 20 years. I feel blessed to have been part of such an amazing organization that profoundly changes the lives of people who are blind or visually impaired. It has been an honor and a privilege to lead and represent Leader Dog during my tenure.

I am grateful beyond measure to our team and volunteers who make a difference in the lives of so many; our board and committee members who give their time, talent and treasure to our cause; our donors and Lions clubs who believe in the value of and strongly support our mission; and our clients who inspire me each and every day. I also am eternally thankful for my family and would not be where I am today without their love and support.

Helen Keller said, "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing." These past 20 years with Leader Dog have certainly been a great adventure and I look forward to a new and different adventure in retirement!

With deepest gratitude and best wishes for a bright future,

Susan M. Daniels

Susan M. Daniels
President & CEO

Cover photo - "There are times when using a cane is more advantageous than using your guide dog. That's why I keep my O&M skills fresh. This trip included driving from Wisconsin to Florida and back; so, I felt it was proper to have LD Jackson stay with a friend for his own little vacation."

- LDB Client BJ Blahnik





Kiandra & LD Nevaeh

It isn't surprising that growing up on a farm led Leader Dog Client Kiandra to pursue a degree in animal sciences. She always enjoyed the animals and was very active in 4-H growing up.

But her first year at a Big 10 university posed new challenges like making her way through the maze of tables and chairs in the dining hall. Kiandra added, "And I was lonely. When I went across campus with my cane, people very seldom spoke to me."

Kiandra knew it was time for a change. She applied to Leader Dog and, this past June, was paired with Leader Dog Nevaeh (heaven spelled backward). "After just a week with Nevaeh, I was already amazed," said Kiandra. "I felt so free and independent. I knew she was going to impact my life dramatically."

Kiandra's guide dog mobility instructor (GDMI), Beth Dahlke, made sure the team had the opportunity to train at a local farm. "Nevaeh did great," said Kiandra, "And it really boosted my confidence in her."

When it was time to head back to school in August, Field Services GDMI Sue Hackman visited Kiandra on campus. "Sue came out to help, which calmed my nerves. I appreciated learning how to navigate both outside and inside with her assistance," explained Kiandra.

This year's classes require Kiandra to spend time on a working farm. Leader Dog Nevaeh is sure to help her navigate safely. Nevaeh has also helped open Kiandra's world to new people. "So far this year, with Navaeh by my side, I have talked to so many other students," shared Kiandra. "I really appreciate everything that Leader Dog has done for me."

Though Kiandra lost her vision when she was 15, doctors have not been able to provide a concrete diagnosis as to why. One possibility is that her sight loss is related to an extremely rare genetic disorder that she has, but it's so rare they are unsure.



KIANDRA WALKING TO CLASS WITH LD NEVAEH AND ON THE LAWN OUTSIDE HER DORM.

LETTERS TO LEADER DOG



I learned so much from the certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS) and the other clients. I have been using the new and refined techniques daily since coming home. I'm also referring people to the program!

Thank you again for such an amazing opportunity and showing me that I'm not broken and alone.

Ernie

My greatest lesson learned in prison has come through my participation in Leader Dog's Prison Puppies. My transformation in terms of compassion, responsibility, consistency, sacrifice and love has evolved in ways I never saw coming. I can honestly say I had no clue as to what unconditional love felt like until the day I met my first dog.

I never imagined I could feel a level of wholeness while serving time, yet I find myself complete in these moments of my life. Being fed spiritually and emotionally to satisfaction. This by far has opened my mind up to countless understandings of life and love. To know that a dog can give a person back their life of normalcy, take away fear and anxiety, be your eyes and not judge you.

I'm extremely blessed to contribute to a cause that's greater than myself and my circumstance. I'm forever thankful to Leader Dog, the wardens and staff and puppy counselors who allowed me to participate in this wonderful life-changing program.

Forever thankful,

Bobie



Sonia's dog was raised as part of Prison Puppies. This is a portion of the letter she wrote to the inmate who raised her Leader Dog:

My name is Sònia and I live near Barcelona, Spain. It pains me deeply to not know who I'm writing these words to, while I've got Kano sitting at my feet, feeling like the luckiest person in the world.

I have to thank you for participating in Leader Dog's program and taking care of our Kano, who even though he is with me now, will always have a piece of you inside of him.

We have only spent our first days together, but he has filled my heart with joy and I've seen much more than I ever could have imagined. I feel free again next to Kano, as if I got my sight back.

You did a great job with him and I want you to know that he has become a great guide dog for me.

Big hug from me and a thousand licks from Kano.

Sònia



Let me tell you about our excitement! We are sitting in Texas Roadhouse, waiting for our food and all of a sudden sirens and flashing lights are going off, without hesitation Leader Dog Millie stands up under the table, I grabbed her harness handle and she guided me to the door. Leader Dog Millie, myself, my fiancé and friend were the first out of the restaurant. There wasn't a fire, but Millie knew to get us out!

Guide dog mobility instructors at Leader Dogs for the Blind train our dogs for any/every situation.

Dawn
SEPT 2023 FB post



Why Not Me? LDB Client BJ Blahnik



Anyone who has experienced a presentation given by LDB Client BJ Blahnik will be hard-pressed to forget him. He tells stories of his life in a way that draws you in and makes time fly. After interviewing BJ for this article, it quickly became apparent that his words tell his story best.



Ways Leader Dog Has Changed My Life

I went to Leader Dog as a person of “Why Me?” And after 21 days, I left Leader Dog thinking “Why Not Me?” The training is more than just learning how to use a guide dog, it’s about problem solving and building trust. Taking one step at a time and learning to navigate life through all its obstacles creates empowerment.

By saving myself, I have been able to help others and become a contributing part of society. I now have the ability to motivate and inspire people all over the world through my words and actions. I have found my purpose and the drive to continue and help the next person wherever they may be, I say to them I am here and willing to help. All you need to do is ask and we will be there.

The most important thing Leader Dog helped me achieve was a daily drive to wake up and see what the day was going to bring. Not every day is an amazing adventure, it’s the simple things like hearing how my children’s school day went or preparing for my next inspirational speech. Every day I now wake with the excitement of having a purpose in life and this is the most important thing Leader Dog allowed me to have.

My Leader Dogs are Impressive

My dogs have guided me around broken glass, open manholes and safely across some of the busiest streets in America and abroad. One saved my life when a bus ran a red light, and another stopped me from walking off of a 30-foot cliff.

Though I think the most impressive are the times I do not even know about. I was in between dogs, and I was walking my normal daily route using my cane. During this walk, I tripped on cracks in the sidewalk and hit my face into many different branches. On all my previous walks I never knew these obstacles existed because my dog safely guided me around them. The impact guide dogs have is unmeasurable because they allow blind people to travel through life safely.

Why I Support Leader Dog

Going to Leader Dog was the best decision I ever made in my life (yes, my wife knows I say this all the time) because they helped show me how to be the person I always desired to be. They showed me how to be a contributor to society, and being able to help people has become a passion of mine. I was given a gift and being able to pay it forward has been a blessing.





"There are times where you will bump into something but so does everyone else and that is called life. Your perception on life is based on how you get back up when you fall down and with my Leader Dog, I have all the confidence in the world that each time I will continue to get up and keep moving forward."



BJ SPEAKS TO A GROUP OF LIONS MEMBERS ▲

A Lion Led Me to Leader Dog

Before coming to Leader Dog, BJ met a person who was a Lion who told him all about Lions, Lionism and Leader Dog. After spending many hours together, they created a bond. Later, the Lion told BJ that his Lions club would help BJ get services from Leader Dog. BJ's response, "No, thank you. I'm not that blind, and how would a dog change my life?" But with encouragement from his family, BJ decided to go for it.

When BJ returned home with his first Leader Dog, Diesel, he met a family whose son was blind. BJ took the time to speak with them and was able to help them with an issue the family was experiencing. "I felt pretty good about myself for the first time in years," said BJ. "On that day, I thought back to the Lion who talked about Lions, Lionism and Leader Dog, and this was why I joined the Lions club, because I enjoy helping those in need."

Interested in becoming a Lion? Find a Lions club in your area at lionsclubs.org or call Lion Beth Slade, LDB director of Lions engagement, at 248.218.6421.



BJ MEETS HIS NEWEST LEADER DOG



When Hero entered the home and lives of Breeding Hosts Carrie and Geoff Orlando as a Leader Dog dad, they immediately fell in love with the big yellow Labrador. His mild manner fit perfectly with their household.

Though most Leader Dog Dads' service can go on for years, Hero's came to an end after a little over a year. Following our breeding host protocol, Carrie and Geoff were offered the option to adopt Hero as their own—but they had something else in mind. Hero was young, and Carrie and Geoff believed he was destined for more than being a pet. Because they believed him to be exceptional, they wanted to give him a chance to change someone's life.

"We both have people in our lives who may be affected with vision loss down the line," said Carrie.

So, they brought Hero back to LDB for evaluation and he was placed into formal training to be a guide dog. After successfully completing four months of training, Leader Dog Hero was matched with a client from Spain.

Carrie and Geoff's life with Hero came full circle when they were able to meet his partner, Karla. "Just to hear how long Karla has waited [for a Leader Dog] and what she's been through, it erased any doubts that we had [about taking Hero back to Leader Dog]," said Carrie.

But Hero, Carrie and Geoff's impact doesn't end here. Three of Hero's offspring are now working Leader Dogs, and eight are still in training!



HERO WITH CARRIE (LEFT) AND GEOFF (RIGHT) ▲

CLIENT KARLA AND LD HERO ▼

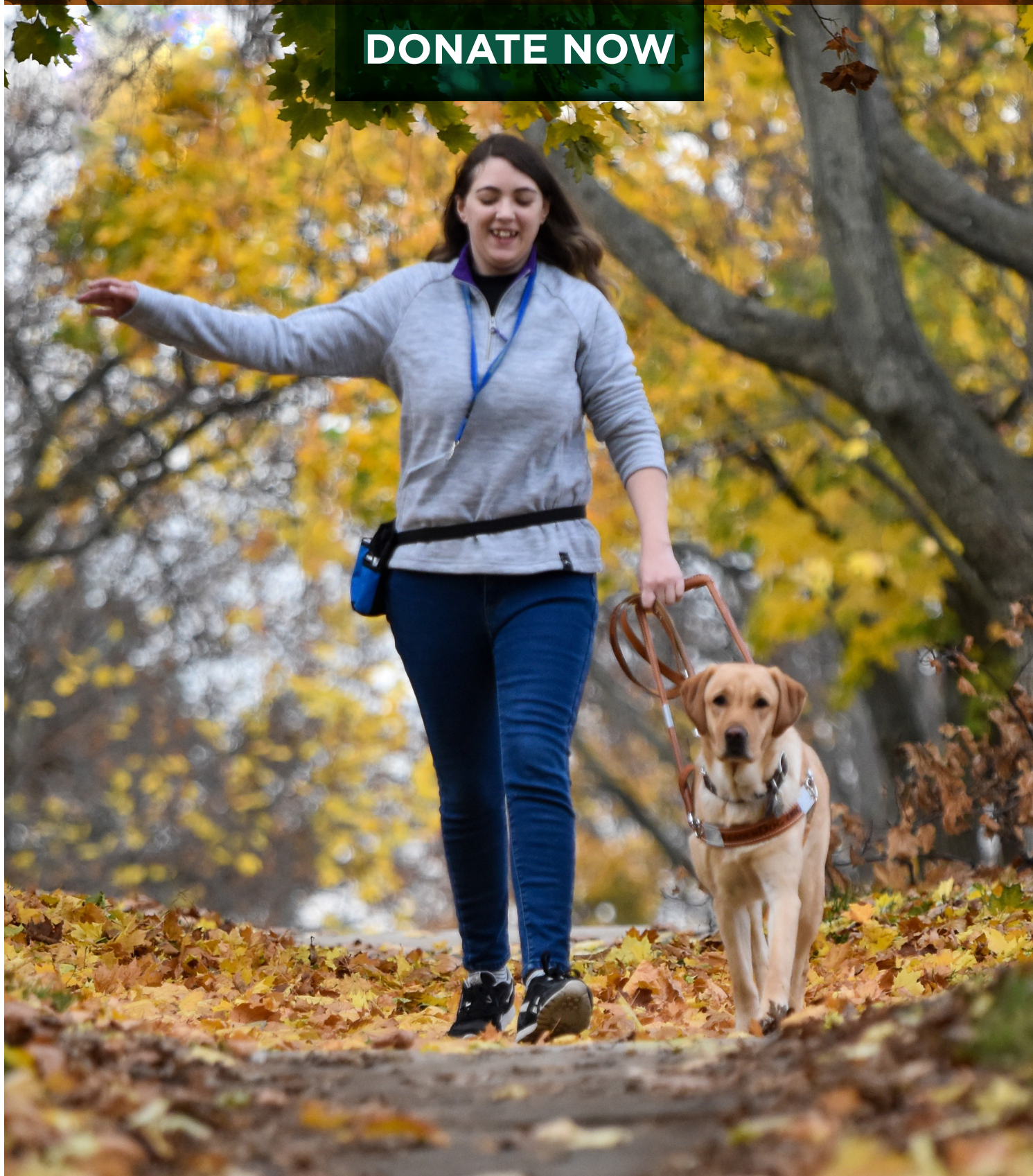


Carrie and Geoff are currently temporary hosts to a male breeding dog under the recently developed breeding host options. To learn more, scan the QR code.



If you are enjoying this issue and would like to support Leader Dog, you can make an online donation and make even more people unstoppable TODAY by clicking below.

DONATE NOW



AAA - THE AUTO CLUB GROUP RECEIVES OUTSTANDING CORPORATION AWARD

The Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) of Greater Detroit recently awarded AAA - The Auto Club Group, a leading provider of insurance and travel services, with their Outstanding Corporation Award. The award recognizes AAA's exceptional philanthropic and community involvement, with special regard to its partnership with Leader Dogs for the Blind.

AAA - The Auto Club Group has been a generous Leader Dog supporter since 2018. AAA has sponsored several events and programs including our Dinner in the Dark fundraiser and Teen Summer Camp, a free camp that helps blind teenagers develop confidence and create long-lasting friendships.

Going beyond providing financial support, AAA - The Auto Club Group has engaged its employees in volunteer activities at Leader Dog. Their employees have participated in camp activities, fundraisers and as breeding dog hosts.

Through their partnership with Leader Dog, AAA has strengthened its commitment to diversity and inclusion in their workforce. A Leader Dog client they met through the partnership is now employed with them as a talent acquisition coordinator.

AAA - The Auto Club Group also supports other organizations in the community including donating laptops to several Detroit schools to facilitate virtual learning and offering child safety seat checks. AAA funded the Connected Futures program, which provides technology and internet access to students in Detroit public schools.

Megan Williams, senior vice president of human resources at AAA - The Auto Club Group, said that the company is honored to receive the Outstanding Corporation Award from AFP. She added that AAA is proud to partner with Leader Dog and other organizations that make a positive difference in the community.

We congratulate AAA - The Auto Club Group on receiving this well-deserved recognition and thank them for their continued support and collaboration.

The Outstanding Corporation Award is one of the most prestigious and longest-running awards given by AFP, a professional association that promotes ethical and effective fundraising.



A SUMMER CAMPER TACKLES THE ROPES COURSE.

MEGAN WILLIAMS OF AAA PRESENTS AT LEADER DOG'S DINNER IN THE DARK.



TEVRA BRANDS DISCOUNT

Tevra Brands believes in offering innovative, high quality, affordable products that will keep your pet happy and healthy. As a member of the Leader Dog community, you're entitled to a 25% discount at tevrapiet.com on all products! Just enter the code 'leader25' at checkout.

If you have questions about Tevra Brands products or if you have accessibility issues with their website, please call them at 844.276.3290.



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25% off ALL PRODUCTS at
tevrapiet.com/products today!



FLEA & TICK



TREATS



HEALTH & WELLBEING

SIMPLE WAYS TO MAKE A BIG IMPACT



Leaving a donation to Leader Dogs for the Blind in your will or trust is a very simple but impactful way to support the work we do and ensure our future. Another way to make a lasting difference is to designate Leader Dog as a beneficiary of your retirement plan, IRA, life insurance or donor-advised fund.

To find out more about donating these types of assets or joining our Legacy Society, please contact Lora Cabarios, director of personal and planned giving, at 248.650.7109 or lora.cabarios@LeaderDog.org.

NEW LEGACY SOCIETY MEMBERS

Bill and Andrea Stickney

Mary Ann Maher Edgin and Gregory C. Edgin

Cheryl AE Sacrates

You are invited to join the
LEADER DOGS FOR THE BLIND
LEGACY SOCIETY



Can you answer “YES” to any of these questions?

- Are you a last-minute shopper?
- Do you have a hard-to-buy-for person on your gift list who already has everything they need?
- Do you want to give a gift that does double-duty?

Leader Dogs for the Blind can help! We offer a variety of ways for you to check people off your gift list AND make a positive impact on our clients at the same time.



GIFT AN EXPERIENCE



Purchase a luminary to be displayed at our **Light Up Leader Dog** event for yourself or a loved one now through December 9, 2023.

Purchase the registration fee for someone to join you for our **Frozen Paw 5K** on January 21, 2024 in Rochester, Michigan.



SPONSOR A PUPPY



Symbolically sponsor a Future Leader Dog to help build the foundation for future puppies and their guide dog careers (includes an adorable plush puppy to commemorate your donation).



MAKE AN HONOR DONATION



Make a donation, amount of your choosing, in honor of someone special and we'll send them a holiday card notifying them of your gift.



Start (or finish) your holiday shopping now at LeaderDog.org/ways-to-give/holiday-giving-ideas



As with all donations to Leader Dog, a 501(c)3 organization, your donation is 100% tax deductible to the extent provided by law.

When Doug Wright joined the Leader Dog board in 2014, he was already familiar with our mission. His interest began 20 years earlier when his sister, Deborah, received her first Leader Dog. Since then, Doug says, Leader Dog has been a big part of their family.

Doug is a certified public accountant and shareholder at Gordon Advisors, a public accounting firm. He served as chair of the LDB audit committee until 2020 and continues today as a member with

his accounting and financial acumen being of great benefit to Leader Dog.

In both his 30-year professional career and during his personal time, Doug spends a significant amount

of time working with nonprofit organizations. He advises their management and boards in many areas including complex accounting issues, training

Doug Wright

(pictured with his sister's
Leader Dog, Nugget)



employees and understanding the reporting and tax issues unique to nonprofits.

For Leader Dog, Doug has helped facilitate brainstorming sessions bringing together a cross section of employees to share observations and recommendations on LDB operations. "What a fantastic way to continuously improve," said Doug.

Doug is a graduate of the University of Michigan and a member of the American Institute of CPAs and the Michigan Association of CPAs. His volunteer work includes being past Board Chair of Common Ground in Oakland County and coaching with the Royal Oak Sandlot League.

We thank Doug for his service and continued support of the Leader Dog mission.

"I work with a variety of nonprofit organizations, so I can attest that the honors that Leader Dog has received as a Best Run organization are well deserved. As a LDB trustee, I enjoy being able to work with an incredible group of employees and volunteers who are passionate about the important work they do."



MISSION MOMENT

"It's been a roller coaster since I lost my eyesight. At first, I didn't know there was life after being blind. I feel like new doors have opened for me, everything feels right."

~Kasson and LD Odyssey

Gifts of Appreciated Stock are a Win-Win



DONOR HIGHLIGHT

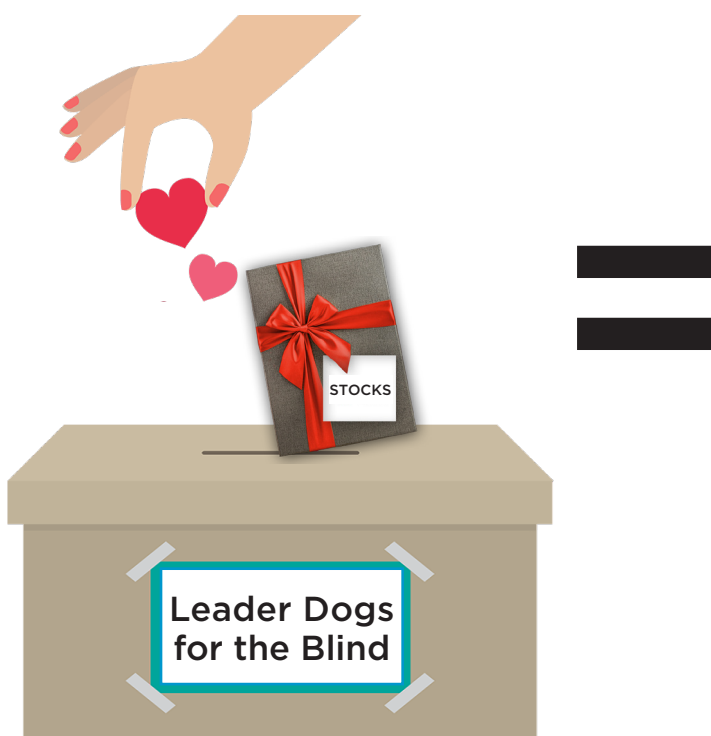
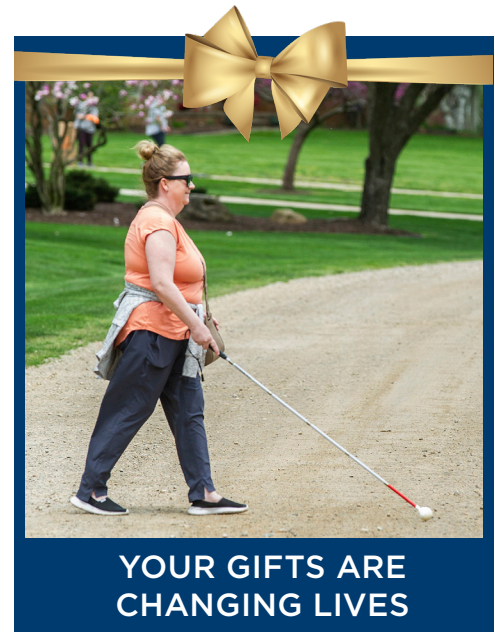
As a 100% philanthropically funded nonprofit, every gift we receive is critical in making our clients unstoppable. As you plan your year-end donations this holiday season, please consider a gift of appreciated stock. Non-cash gifts, like stock, help us further our mission and can provide significant tax benefits to you.

Recently, we asked a longtime supporter why he and his wife chose to give appreciated stocks to Leader Dog and we loved his response. “We have been giving stock to Leader Dog for many years,” he shared. “A few years ago, we came to the campus in Rochester Hills for a tour and experienced Leader Dog’s life-changing work for ourselves. That was the moment we knew we needed to contribute in a greater way. Gifts of appreciated stocks are the best way for us to make a larger gift and impact more lives. We know our gifts are being used to empower people who are blind or visually impaired, so it’s truly a win-win.”

Here are some reasons why giving stock might make sense for you:

- You know your gift will provide lifelong skills for safe, independent travel for people who need it most.
- You can make an even greater impact on the lives of our clients.
- Depending on your tax situation, you may receive considerable tax benefits. We recommend consulting with your financial advisor for personalized advice.
- The process of transferring appreciated stock is swift and straightforward, allowing your generous contribution to quickly reach our clients.

To find out more about donating appreciated stock, please contact Missy Aupperle, director of personal giving, at melissa.aupperle@leaderdog.org or 248.218.6221.



For the past 12 years, Sue Daniels has served as President and CEO of Leader Dogs for the Blind. This simple sentence encompasses many layers of dedication, compassion, guidance and support earnestly undertaken to make Leader Dog's clients unstoppable.

The list of Sue's accomplishments could easily fill this issue of Update, so we chose a few to highlight as our "Thank You for 20 Great Years of Leadership."

Since September 23, 2011 when Sue was promoted from CFO to CEO, Leader Dog has served: 2,015 guide dog clients, 1,085 O&M clients and 199 summer campers. In her time as CEO, Sue has:

Refined Board of Trustees committees including Mission Assurance & Quality; Information Systems; Ethics; and Assistance Technology, Accessibility & Advocacy Committee; and expanded board involvement in fundraising and events.

Led the largest project in Leader Dog's 84-year history, the creation of the canine development center. The \$14.5 million renovation and construction was completed in 2016, under budget.

Received the largest endowment of funds by a grantor, Edward T. and Ellen K. Dryer Charitable Foundation, to establish an orientation and mobility internship to train new certified O&M specialists.

Received the Mutual of America Community Partnership Award for Leader Dog's Prison Puppies initiative with Nestlé Purina PetCare Company and the Iowa Department of Corrections.

Formalized and professionalized all administrative areas of the business including finance, human resources and information technology.

Supported the expansion of on-campus volunteerism, including formal policies and procedures, thus acknowledging the importance of our volunteers.

Led the organization through the COVID-19 pandemic and to being the first U.S. guide dog organization to safely welcome clients back to on-campus training.

Worked with staff and board members to revise Leader Dog's mission, vision and values.



SUE WITH GUIDE DOG CLIENTS ▲

SUE CUTTING THE RIBBON TO THE CANINE DEVELOPMENT CENTER WITH BOARD MEMBER JOHN HEBERT ▼



Top Dog Awards - A Year of Remarkable Giving



LIONS CLUB CONNECTION

IN EVERY LEADER DOG LIES THE HEART OF A LION—A Leader Dog partner since 1939.

We are excited to share some great news that has brightened 2023 for hundreds of LDB clients. There has been an unprecedented upsurge in the number of Lions clubs donating \$5,000 or more to receive a Top Dog Award over the past year. Leader Dog recognizes Lions clubs that donate \$5,000+ to the annual fund as “Top Dog” clubs. This growth demonstrates the generosity and dedication of Lions clubs worldwide, and was sparked by multiple reasons, including:

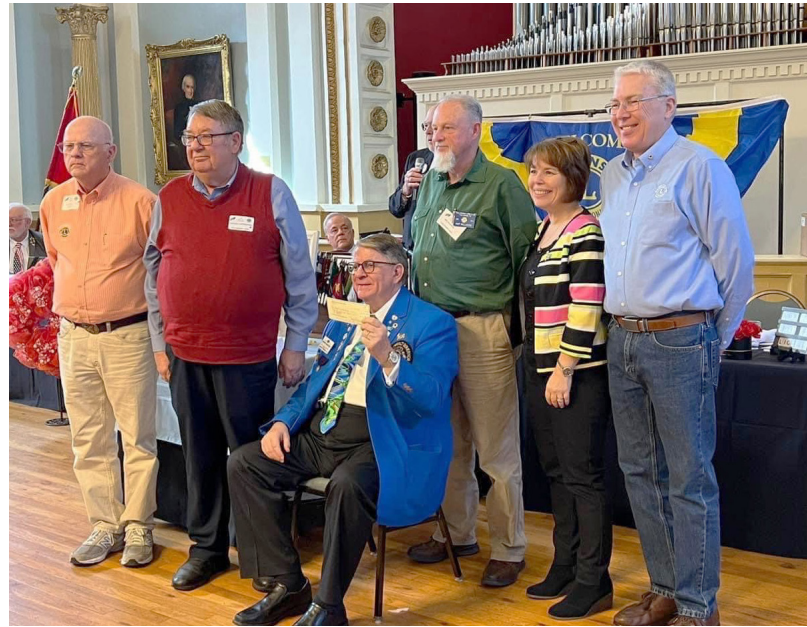
Estate Contributions: Several Lions clubs received estate gifts from local residents requesting the money to pass through to Leader Dog. One club, the Tullahoma Lions (Tennessee), were left a significant gift from a woman with no known ties to Lions or Leader Dog. Estate gifts are a thoughtful way to leave a lasting legacy and make a positive impact on the lives of people who are visually impaired.

Support Amid Challenges: Sadly, a few clubs had to close their doors; however, their commitment to serving Leader Dog remained until the end. As they dispersed final donations, their contributions put them on the Top Dog Award list, reminding us of the enduring spirit of Lionism.

Consistent Donors: Many Lions clubs have donated at the \$5,000+ level for years. Their continued dedication showcases their understanding of the profound impact their donations have on the lives of people with visual impairments. One example is the Eustis Lions Club (Nebraska) that has donated over \$84,000 in the past 14 years!

All contributions, regardless of size, are transformative and incredibly important. They enable Leader Dog to provide essential services to people who are blind, many who cannot find services elsewhere. These donations support our Guide Dog, O&M and Teen Summer Camp programs that are a beacon of hope for individuals with visual impairments, offering both newfound independence and social connections.

Thank you to all the Lions clubs who have made the Top Dog Award a symbol of compassion and service. Together, we are changing lives and brightening the world for those who need it most.



TULLAHOMA LIONS PRESENT
\$60K DONATION TO LEADER
DOG AT 12-S CONVENTION.



◀ SAMPLE OF PATCH AWARDED
TO TOP DOG CLUBS.

As we celebrate this remarkable year of giving, let's remember the powerful impact we have when we unite for a common cause.



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LIGHT UP LEADER DOG

JOIN US FOR A GRAND, IN-PERSON EXPERIENCE
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2023
from 5:30–8:00 p.m.



HELP US MAKE THE CAMPUS EVEN BRIGHTER!

For a \$10 donation, you can have a luminary placed in your honor on the campus of Leader Dogs for the Blind during the event. Our goal is to light up the campus with over 2,000 luminaries honoring our supporters.

Attendees will have the opportunity to browse through the marketplace, partake in some warm, winter beverages and great food, enjoy the sounds of holiday music, walk the paths of luminaries and view the Leader Dog campus all lit up!

Admission is FREE, but donations are certainly appreciated.

For tickets or additional information, please visit
LeaderDog.org/light-up-leader-dog or scan the QR code.

