**Leader Dogs for the Blind**

**Update - Issue 2, NOV 2023**

**Why Not Me?**

**Message from the President**

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 l look forward to a new and different adventure in retirement!

With deepest gratitude and best wishes for a bright future,

Sincerely,

Susan M. Daniels

President & CEO

Photo: Sue Daniels sits on a bench outside the canine center in a bright-colored blazer, polka dot blouse and grey slacks. A Leader Dog in training wearing a harness sits next to her.

Photo: A yellow Labrador retriever Leader Dog walks in harness next to a client. You can just see the client’s hand holding the harness and the dog is walking along a beautiful fall leaf-colored sidewalk with muted blurred colorful trees in the background.

Cover Photo: Three children and their parents stand next to a life-sized Goofy. Goofy has his arms around two of the children. The father is wearing a pastel t-shirt, khaki shorts and is holding a white cane. His wife in a white t-shirt and striped pants stands next to him. The whole family is smiling. Quote: "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

**Client Spotlight**

**From Farm to Campus (to Farm) – 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.”

Call out box: 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.

Photo: A woman in a blue shirt, jeans and backpack walks in front of a group of school buildings. She has a yellow Labrador retriever in harness guiding her. Caption: Kiandra walking to class with LD Nevaeh.

Photo: A woman with reddish-blonde hair in a ponytail crouches down next to a yellow lab in harness on grass on a sunny day. The woman is wearing sunglasses. Caption: 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

Photo: Ernie stands next to COMS Brad on a corner in Rochester Hills. Ernie is holding his white cane in his right hand and a coffee in his left. Ernie is wearing a red and white plaid shirt and jeans while Brad is wearing a blue shirt and grey pants. Both are wearing sunglasses on a sunny day.

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

Photo: A black Labrador retriever is pictured wearing his blue bandana with red lettering that reads “Future Leader Dog” He’s about three months old and is standing on a padded platform next to an inmate. The puppy is looking up for direction from the inmate. Only from the waist down is shown of the inmate, just his blue pants with an orange stripe down the side.

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

Photos: Sònia’s graduation photo is pictured. She’s wearing a blue hoodie, jeans and sunglasses while sitting next to her yellow Labrador retriever in harness.

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

Photo: Dawn sits on green grass with one leg out in front of her. She’s wearing glasses, a blue Leader Dog polo and jeans. Dawn has long, dark blonde hair. Her Leader Dog, a yellow Labrador retriever in harness, lays under Dawn’s leg. A wrought iron fence and bushes are in the background.

**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.

Photo: BJ stands in the canine center conference room in a dark blue suit and tie. His Leader Dog lays at his feet in harness and BJ is stepping on the leash. The walls are orange and there’s a wood cabinet in the background with a TV. He is seemingly giving a speech. No caption.

Photo: BJ and his three children are pictured all huddled up together smiling. It’s a close-up photo with BJ in the middle and his kids are all leaning on him.

Photo: BJ is in a big room with grey and white wallpaper. There’s a white screen behind him. BJ is holding a microphone and there’s a large crowd in front of him, sitting in chairs, listening to his speech. A quote is laid over part of the photo that reads: "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." Caption: BJ speaks to a group of Lions members

Call-out box: 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.

Photo: BJ sits on his legs facing a yellow Labrador retriever. BJ has his right hand on the side of the dogs face in one of the residence rooms on campus. You can see a bed on the right and the walls are white and maroon. The dog looks at BJ who is wearing a blue polo and jeans. Caption: BJ meets his newest Leader Dog

**Leader Dog Hero’s Unique Journey**

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!

Photos: Hero with his blue bandana with red lettering that reads “Leader Dog Dad” is shown. He has his tongue out and it looks like he’s smiling. Next to this is another photo of Hero in harness looking serious. Below those two are a photo of Hero in the back seat of a car with grey interior. You can see Carrie with brown hair and sunglasses in the front taking a selfie. Next to that photo is Carrie’s husband, Geoff, lying on a couch next to Hero. Geoff’s head is lying on Hero’s chest. Hero is upside down and both look sleepy.

Photo: A woman with curly brown hair wearing sunglasses, a red, blue and black patterned sweater and black pants sits on a bench next to a yellow Labrador retriever. The lab’s head is tilted slightly and he’s wearing a harness. The woman has her arm around her Leader Dog. Caption: Client Karla and LD Hero

Call-out box: 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 (a QR code is shown but you can access this information by visiting leaderdog.org/volunteer/host-a-breeding-dog).

**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.

Call-out box: 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.

Photo: A group of campers and instructors stand on either side of a tightrope roughly a foot off the ground. Everyone is wearing a light blue shirt with the Teen Summer Camp icon on the front and the AAA logo on the back. One male camper stands on the tightrope and holds a dangling rope in his hands as he navigates his way down the tightrope. Caption: A summer camper tackles the ropes course.

Photo: A woman with medium brown hair stands at a podium in a dark dress speaking to a crowd. A large white screen is behind her with Dinner in the Dark and AAA logos, and text. Caption: 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 tevrapet.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.

Graphic: A dark blue box with a black Labrador retriever Future Leader Dog is shown along with the wording “Helping people who are blind or visually impaired ‘Live a life without boundaries.’ Learn more at Tevrabrands.com. Tevra is partnered with Leader Dogs for the Blind.” Below the graphic says “Use code LEADER25 to get 25% off all products at tevrapet.com/products today! A band of three colors is shown below this with wording flea & tick, treats and health & wellbeing.

Logo: Tevra’s logo is shown which is “tevra” in lower case and “brands” in upper case; both in grey. There are rainbow-like dots above the wording in orange, yellow and blue.

**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

Photo: A young brunette-haired man wearing dark sunglasses, a grey jacket, jeans and a black backpack squats down facing a yellow lab in harness. A grassy background and sidewalk is faded out and the words “You are invited to join the Leader Dogs for the Blind Legacy Society” is written in gold and green ink in the upper left corner of the photo.

**Giving Ideas**

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.

To gift an experience visit leaderdog.org/events

***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).

To sponsor a puppy visit leaderdog.org/ways-to-give/sponsor-a-puppy

***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.

To make an honor donation visit leaderdog.org/honor-a-person-or-pet-this-holiday-season

Call out box: A green box is shown with the wording Start (or finish) your holiday shopping now at LeaderDog.org/ways-to-give/holiday-giving-ideas.

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

Photos: There is a photo of a cute yellow lab/golden cross Future Leader Dog sitting in front of a snowy background at the top of the page. A wooden fence, sled and trees with lights are in the background. Under the “Gift an experience” green box with white bow are the logos for Light up Leader Dog and Frozen Paw. Under the “Sponsor a puppy” green box with red bow are photos of a black Labrador retriever sitting next to a plastic toy and a photo of a black lab stuffed puppy on a white background. Under the “Make an honor donation” green box with a gold ribbon is a photo of the card that will be sent if you donate. It’s a yellow lab sticking his tongue out like he’s catching snow. There is a wooden box, tree and wooden fence in the background with a sled in the foreground. The puppy is wearing a Future Leader Dog bandana and the words “Celebrate the beauty of the season” is pictured in white on a dark green banner below.

**Board Member Focus – Doug Wright**

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 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.

Quote: “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.”

Photo: Doug is pictured in a red polo, khaki shorts and sandals. He has grey hair and glasses and is on one knee next to a yellow Labrador in harness who is sitting outside on a sunny day. Caption: Pictured with his sister’s Leader Dog, Nugget

**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

Photo: Kasson is pictured with a big smile on his face. He has a shaved head, black beard and is wearing a white t-shirt. Kasson has his arms wrapped around his Leader Dog, a black lab in harness, who is looking serious and staring straight at the camera.

**Donor Highlight**

**Gifts of Appreciated Stock are a Win-Win**

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.

Photo: A female client is shown walking with a white cane on a dirt road. This picture is inside a blue box with a gold bow at the top making the whole thing look like a gift. The words “Your gifts are changing lives” is in white text below the photo.

Graphic & photo: A graphic of a cardboard box with a sign on the front that reads “Leader Dogs for the Blind” is pictured with a hand above it dropping hearts and another box that reads “Stocks” with a red ribbon. These are all being deposited into the larger Leader Dog box below. Then, there’s a large equals sign to the middle/right of this graphic and on the right is a photo of a red-headed male client wearing sunglasses and a dark suit with a lighter shirt and tie. The client is on one knee with his Leader Dog, a black lab, sitting in harness in front of him. A large building is in the background with green grass out front on a bright sunny day.

**LDB President and CEO Retires**

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.

Photo: A blonde woman in a black and white dress and glasses sits on a couch to the left of a dark-haired woman in a maroon sweater and tan pants. A man in a blue baseball hat, grey long-sleeved shirt and jeans sits to the blond woman’s left in a plush chair. The people on the left and right of the blonde woman have Leader Dogs in harness (yellow lab on right and chocolate lab on the left). Bookshelves are stocked in the background. Caption: Sue with guide dog clients

Photo: A woman with short blonde hair is pictured wearing a blue and white patterned dress with a blue blazer and white and black heels. A grey-haired man in a dark suit and purple tie stands to her left with a pair of large scissors. A few men in suits are in the background and they are all in front of the canine center. A photo inset of Sue is pictured of her speaking at a podium. Caption: Sue cutting the ribbon to the canine development center with board member John Hebert

**Lions Club Connection**

**Top Dog Awards – A Year of Remarkable Giving**

***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.

Photo: A group of older men with grey hair stand with a younger woman standing in between them. One of the men in the middle is sitting and holding up a check. Caption: Tullahoma Lions present $60K donation to Leader Dog at 12-S convention.

Photo: A maroon rectangular patch with white writing, outline and white dog head is shown. Top Dog Club Award is stitched in maroon inside the dog head with a Lions logo making up the nose. The Leader Dog logo and 2022-2023 is stitched in white outside the dog head. Caption: Sample of patch awarded to top dog clubs.

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

**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.

Leader Dogs for the Blind

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**Harness & Leash**

**Edition 43**

**Message from Melissa Priester, Manager of Client Services**

Wow, we have sent out 43 issues of H&L over the years—that’s a lot of information. But to keep in step with the rest of LDB by reviewing our processes and updating as needed, we will be making changes to Harness & Leash. The first likely being a new name since Harness & Leash doesn’t represent our many O&M and Teen Summer Camp clients.

 We will work with our Voice of Client Advisory Team (VOCAT) among others to develop a newsletter that is meaningful to you, our clients. This may mean sending the communication at different times than Update is distributed. So, this may be the last Harness & Leash you receive combined with Update.

However, what isn’t changing are client services office hours, which are Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. EST. We try to answer every call, but if you are sent to voicemail, please leave a detailed message and we will call you back as soon as possible. As always, you can also contact the client services department through our email, clientservices@leaderdog.org, which goes to our entire team.

**Decision to No Longer Train German Shepherds**

Our goal is to breed and raise dogs with the highest potential for future success. Success being a dog that becomes a working Leader Dog or is selected for breeding. Our success rates for Labrador retrievers and golden retrievers are similar to the success rates for these breeds at other guide dog organizations. Also, like other organizations, we have not experienced the same level of success for German shepherds. This has prompted our decision to focus solely on Labrador retrievers and golden retrievers; again, like other guide dog organizations.

This decision was not made lightly. We have worked diligently to improve the success of our shepherds by introducing new bloodlines into our breeding process, enhancing our puppy raising protocols, adapting new training guidelines, changing housing while on campus for training and developing processes to support GSDs during veterinary procedures. Despite our best efforts, their success rate remains very low.

Taking all these factors into consideration, we have made the difficult, yet appropriate, decision to stop breeding, raising and training shepherds. The exception are dogs currently in training which will be given every opportunity to become a working Leader Dog. This change allows us to focus our time and resources into maximizing the success of our Labrador retriever and golden retriever colonies.

If you have a question regarding this communication, please send an email to Dana Hunter, breeding program manager, at dana.hunter@leaderdog.org.

**This Cane**

The following poem was shared on the Alumni Facebook Page by LDB Client Steve Morelli after his week of O&M at Leader Dog.

This cane

Shaft of shame

Feeler of streets

Gatherer of pity

Attractor of stares

Loose light in my hand this cane

Sensor of bumps

Broadcaster of warning

Parter of crowds

Detector of disaster

Sweep sweep over mines this cane

Reflector of light

Reflector of grace

Reflector of humility

Reminder of fragility

White as an arcing dove this cane

Conjurer of mercy

Granter of forgiveness

Liberator of love

Cutter of shame

This cane

**Preparing for Nighttime Travel**

As we approach winter and earlier sunsets, it is a good time to review best practices for nighttime travel. Though canes and guide dog harnesses have reflective markings, some simple adjustments to standard travel techniques should be included to further reduce risks, such as:

* Wear reflective or high contrast clothing to help alert drivers to your presence.
* Use upper- and lower-body self-protective techniques to avoid unwanted contact with tree branches and other obstacles.
* Wear protective clothing, like a billed hat, to avoid injuries from tree branches or bushes.
* Carry a flashlight to light a path AND increase awareness of your presence.
* Plan the route ahead of time. Keep in mind that traffic patterns can vary for day and night travel including light phases at intersections.
* Remember that landmarks may vary for day and night travel.
* Communicate travel plans and estimated arrival times to friends and family.
* Carry a cell phone in case of emergencies.
* Always use common sense while traveling at night to reduce risks and make safety a priority.

This is not an exhaustive list, but it is a great start when planning. For more information, call client services at 888-777-5332, then hit ‘1’ or email to clientservices@leaderdog.org to have a certified O&M specialist call you back.

**Leader Dog Wants to Stay Connected!**

Do we have your most current contact information? Please provide or update your email address with us to receive communications about program opportunities, organizational updates and additional resources on a timely basis! Call client services at 888-777-5332, then hit ‘1’ or email to clientservices@leaderdog.org.

**Menus4ALL**

There is a new app, Menus4ALL, that pulls from a database of hundreds of thousands of menus across the U.S. and Canada. The app reformats the data into a screen reader-friendly interface. With the app, you can quickly scan a menu—bouncing across categories, zeroing in on items you’re interested in, skimming along the list of prices, and so on. Available on the App Store for iPhone and iPad. They offer a 14-day free trial, then it’s $2.99 per month or $29.99 per year.

**Taking the Lead Podcast**

Are you a Taking the Lead listener? If not, now is the time to start! The co-hosting team of Client Timothy Cuneio, Outreach Manager Leslie Hoskins and Digital Marketing Manager Christina Hepner welcome guests for most episodes, so you will enjoy stories from clients, staff and volunteers.

You can find the podcast on Leader Dog’s website at leaderdog.org/taking-the-lead or wherever you stream podcasts including Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts and Spotify.

**Alumni Facebook Group**

If you have not already joined the LDB Alumni Facebook group, do it today! It is a wonderful place to make connections and share resources. Go to Facebook and search “Leader Dogs for the Blind Alumni.”

**Leader Dog Gift Shop**

All clients receive 15% off at our online gift shop. Enter code “15OFF” at checkout to claim your discount. If you have questions or issues with the gift shop website, you can contact the gift shop at 248-218-6347 or giftshop@leaderdog.org.

 We have a new gift shop coordinator starting in November, so start checking out the website for new offerings in Spring 2024!

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

Your first point of contact for assistance is always the client services department. Call them at 888-777-5332, then choose ‘1’ or email them at clientservices@leaderdog.org.

**Questions, Comments or Suggestions**

Please send comments to UpdateEditor@leaderdog.org or call 248-659-5013.