

Faithful FRIENDS



February 2024

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

*Moving
Leader Dog
Forward*



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Rochester Hills, MI 48307
LeaderDog.org

FOLLOW THE LEADER



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



Dear Friends,

I am honored to be appointed as the new President and CEO of Leader Dogs for the Blind. You may be familiar with me, as I have worked here at Leader Dog for twenty years in various roles and most recently as Chief Philanthropy Officer. I have also served as a volunteer puppy raiser and know firsthand that the humanitarian community that surrounds this mission



is extraordinary. I am passionate about our mission and eager to work with you and our clients to advance this incredible organization to the next level of service provision for the people we serve.

Thank you for being a supporter and advocate for Leader Dog. Your dedication means that we can provide services that are of critical importance. Our clients have limited access to mobility options in their communities, whether that be a guide dog or white cane training, so their ability to receive services from us becomes even more important. Your unwavering support provides opportunity, inclusion and new beginnings for our clients who are blind or visually impaired.

Our guide dog mobility instructors use the command "Forward" to indicate the first step a Leader Dog takes with its partner. I am excited to move Leader Dog forward with you.

With warm gratitude,

Melissa L. Weisse
President and CEO

Get to Know Our New President and CEO

Melissa Weisse first came to Leader Dog in 2003, quickly making an impact as the Manager of Annual Fund and Special Events. She had recently moved from London where she was a Private Client Advisor for Christie's auction company. Melissa then served as a Senior Philanthropy Director before being promoted to Chief Philanthropy Officer in 2003. Melissa's accomplishments at Leader Dog are numerous. Just a few of the many highlights include:



Melissa's passion for our mission is immense and she has supported every facet of the organization, including as a volunteer. Melissa has volunteered as a dog walker on campus and as a puppy raiser for LD Mochi, who was placed with a client in Spain.

◀ **Melissa and Future Leader Dog Mochi**

Our clients are at the center of everything Melissa does. Her work is dedicated to enhancing Leader Dog's programs and services to better support them throughout their lives. This includes developing an international presence in the blindness community and serving on the board of trustees for the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB).

Melissa with LDB Client Caleb R. ▶



Securing a partnership with Nestle' Purina PetCare to donate 100% of the food for our dogs in training, a relationship that continues today. Building a formal philanthropy department with diversified revenue streams resulting in 121% growth in philanthropic revenue. Leading a \$14.5 million fundraising campaign (the largest in Leader Dog's history) to complete our canine development center in 2016. Nurturing collaborative relationships including with Lions Clubs International (she is also a proud member).

Melissa accepting a check from a Lions Top Dog Club. ▲



Throughout the years, Melissa has shown that she is not a "sit on the sidelines" kind of leader. In her own words, "I have traveled extensively across the country from Los Angeles to Manhattan and from North Dakota to Corpus Christi, visiting clients, listening to their stories and learning about what they need from Leader Dog as a service provider." She has proven many times over that she believes our clients are why Leader Dog exists and that our supporters are a driving force that makes Leader Dog possible.



▲ **Melissa rappelling off a building during our Double Dog Dare fundraiser.**

To read more about Melissa, go to leaderdog.org/blog/melissa-weisse-appointed-as-leader-dog-ceo

A Week to Remember

Behind the scenes at Teen Summer Camp, where 16- and 17-year-olds play hard as they work to improve their skills, self-esteem and lives.

Don't tell the participants, but they actually learn a lot of great life skills while at Teen Summer Camp. The week is designed around the FISH!® Philosophy of choosing to create the kind of life you desire. The four core principles are: be there, choose your attitude, make their day and play. These principles are woven throughout a week that many campers remember for years to come.



A Challenging Day at Lions Bear Lake Camp

What better way to start the week than spending a day in nature? Working together to complete a low ropes obstacle course gets the campers talking, laughing and leaning on each other for support. But the highlight of the day is the rock-climbing wall and zipline. Campers push themselves to tackle the climb while being cheered on (quite loudly) by their new friends. Campers often need a few tries to make it to the top, but they learn to tackle this huge hurdle and enjoy the zipline back down to earth. The sense of accomplishment is palpable.



A Fun, Furry Day With Some Leader Dogs

One of the most, if not the most, anticipated days during camp is Dog Day. Campers spend a day one-on-one with a guide dog mobility instructor and a Leader Dog in training. They get to experience traveling with a guide dog and learn about the responsibility of caring for a dog so they can discover if the guide dog lifestyle is for them.

Normally, much of the day is spent outside, but in 2023 bad weather meant that dog walks were moved inside to a local mall (basically a normal teen environment). The mall offered a lot of stairs, obstacles to avoid, such as benches and signage, and a food court, which aren't normally encountered when walking down a sidewalk.

Strengthening Cane Travel Skills

Several times during the week, campers complete activities that help build their orientation and mobility skills (O&M), which includes traveling using a white cane. Scavenger hunts, using a personal GPS device to move from location to location, are a great way for campers to work together to reach the end goal. We give the activity a Zombie Apocalypse theme and the fun factor doubles.

Because many campers have higher education goals, we include a tour of a local college campus and teach them how to use GPS to travel the winding paths that connect the many buildings. For many people who are blind but retain some usable vision, nightfall can limit their vision further; so, we include nighttime travel experiences in camp. For some campers, this is their first experience traveling in the dark independently without needing a person as a sighted guide.



Building Long-Term Friendships

Many of the campers show up on campus having never met anyone their age who is visually impaired. To be able to immerse themselves in a group of 23 teenagers just like them is life changing. By working and having fun together, friendships that will last for years to come are built and solidified. There are active text chains from camp groups that are years old. We've even had campers come for our O&M program 10 years after camp, and make sure their friend from camp was coming in the same class!



It is donations from supporters like you that make this possible!



You Can Make A Greater Impact

As a vital part of the Leader Dog community, you play a critical role in enriching the lives of individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Your contributions mean our clients receive all services free of charge.

Please join other supporters who have chosen to aid our life-changing work with a gift of stock, a grant from a Donor-Advised Fund or a Qualified Charitable Distribution. These tax-smart gifts can allow you to make an even greater impact on the lives of our clients.

To learn more about how your gifts change lives, please contact Missy Aupperle, director of personal giving, at Melissa.aupperle@leaderdog.org

Ideas to Boost Lions Involvement

“Thirty seconds of a Lion’s time can impact the life of someone visually impaired.”

– Past Council Chair and Leader Dog Client Tom Simmons

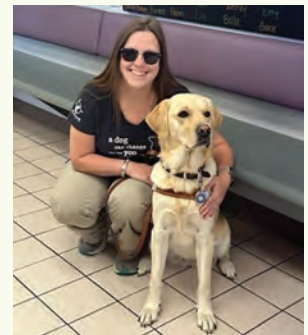
Tom’s right, every action counts. Something as simple as “liking” and sharing a social media post or connecting us to a blindness agency in your area can help us reach people who need our services.

Most Lions clubs are first-rate at hosting fundraising events, but how about trying a non-event fundraiser like Dollars for Dogs? Lion Liz and her Leader Dog, Sunny, partnered with their local veterinary clinic and raised over \$1,400! Free Dollars for Dogs Kits are available on our website under Lions Clubs > Resources > Order Materials for Your Event.

Lions can experience our campus by attending a Lions Experience Tour in 2024. Scheduled for March 16, July 20 and October 19, you’ll tour campus, meet a client and learn the impact LDB has had on their life, and walk under blindfold with an ambassador guide dog and/or a white cane. Pre-registration is required on our website under Lions Clubs > Resources > Book a Tour Experience.

We are currently planning our 2024 Summer Visits for 1st Vice District Governors. This decades-long tradition welcomes VDGs to see how “\$400 and a hatful of ideas” grew into an internationally renowned service organization for people who are blind and visually impaired. Please update your VDG’s contact information on our website under Lions Clubs > Resources > Update Contact Information.

To make it easier, scan this QR code to open the Lions Resources page of our website leaderdog.org/lions-club/resources



Liz F. and LD Sunny



MISSION

MOMENT



After coming to Teen Summer Camp in 2012 and 2013, Hayden returned to Leader Dog in 2021 to train with his first guide dog, Sawyer.

“Sawyer is pretty chill and is rather attached to me...in fact, he likes to lay right on top of me. I finished law school in May 2021 and felt a Leader Dog would make getting around easier. It does, and I can move pretty fast now.

After coming to camp, I already knew and liked the people and facility at Leader Dog, so this is where I wanted to get my guide dog too.”

Hayden P. and LD Sawyer

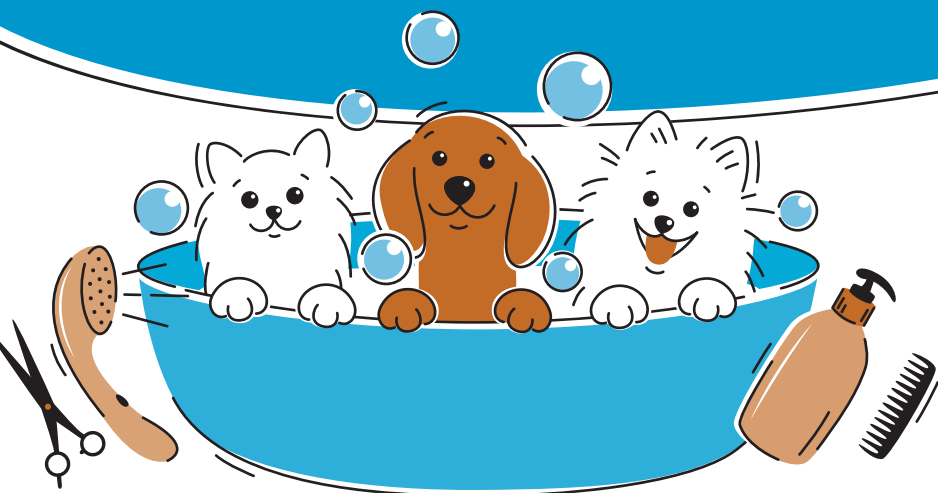


Are you interested in learning more about Leader Dogs for the Blind?

Check out our *Taking the Lead* podcast to hear stories from our clients, staff and blindness industry professionals. The most recent episodes are available on our website, or you can subscribe to *Taking the Lead* on your favorite podcast platform.



GROOMING Your Pet



How often should I groom my pet?

Ideally, you should groom your pet every day because it is a great way to bond with them. Regular grooming can help overcome any body sensitivity issues they may have, like having their paws or hind legs touched, which can make vet visits and nail clipping more difficult. Ease your pet into having the area touched by being relaxed and setting a calm environment – think “spa day.”

Daily brushing prevents your pets’ coat from matting, especially if they have longer hair, and distributes the healthy oils naturally on their skin throughout the coat, promoting new hair growth and skin health.

What brush should I use?

There are a wide variety of brushes available, some your pet may love and some not so much. Slicker brushes are great for removing loose or dead fur, while rubber curry brushes come in different textures that massage the skin and coat. Be mindful of the pressure you are using on your pet, especially with thicker bristles, if your dog is whining or fidgeting, they might not be comfortable.

How often should I bathe my dog?

This can vary greatly depending on your dog’s activity. I personally bathe my dog after camping so I can remove dirt and wash out any ticks he may have acquired. Your best bet is to discuss a bathing schedule with your veterinarian taking your pets’ environment, skin allergies and coat condition into consideration.

Good for their health and well-being

Megan Jones, Leader Dog’s manager of canine care and welfare, is an expert on how to properly care for animals, both physically and mentally. We asked her to answer a few common questions about dog (and cat) grooming.

What if my pet doesn’t like to be groomed?

Not every pet appreciates “spa day.” Using a lick mat is a great way to draw their attention from the grooming process. A little peanut butter*, plain yogurt* or wet pet food are good choices to put on the mat. My dog prefers peanut butter, and I freeze it because it lasts longer. Another choice is a stuffed KONG®, which can also be frozen.

Remember, this should be an enjoyable time for you and your pet. Maybe you’ll even get some kisses in return.

* Not containing xylitol