The Barpal – Hirst Student Center

Freedom starts here.
Our existing student dormitory and administrative building began as a two-bedroom home over 32 years ago. This well-used building has been renovated and refurbished numerous times in response to the organization’s growth, student needs, and general building maintenance. But despite repairs, adaptations, and expansions, its utility and effectiveness have expired.

The building is much too small for our current and future needs, and lacks the space and functionality needed for our students and staff. Due to its age, the building is costly to maintain and lacks many of the design elements and energy efficiencies found in modern-day construction.

Southeastern Guide Dogs’ vision is to be the best nonprofit organization in the United States in terms of impact, innovation and integrity—from the viewpoint of our students, graduates, donors, volunteers and staff. We are committed to providing our students with the highest quality experiences and services possible while they are under our care. We simply cannot achieve our vision and fulfill our commitment to quality in our current facility. While the building has been put to excellent use for over three decades, its current shortfalls negatively affect our students, dogs, staff, and the organization as a whole.
A Vision for the Future

Our students need an environment conducive to learning and collaboration, and our goal is to give them a new home away from home. The Barpal – Hirst Student Center, named for lead donors Margaret and Isaac Barpal and Keith G. Hirst, will maximize our ability to effectively serve our students and graduates. This planned 29,000 square-foot facility will include student housing and dining accommodations, staff offices, and a welcome center for thousands of annual visitors. Located in the heart of our beautiful, 35-acre campus, the proposed center includes capacity for educational presentations, events, and graduations. This essential new project features three main areas: our student rooms, administrative offices, and dining hall. We’re excited to introduce this project to our community of caring supporters!

Student Rooms
Twelve private rooms will provide each student a home-like setting with a double bed, bathroom, closet, sitting area, desk with computer connections and television. Each room will also feature a small outside courtyard where students can groom and bond with their dogs. Covered relief areas will shelter students and dogs from the rain and also facilitate waste management.

Administrative Offices
Offices, conference rooms, storage space and a computer server room will help staff and volunteers in the critical work they do for Southeastern Guide Dogs.

Dining Hall
The Dining Hall will welcome our students for their meals, host on-campus special events, student graduations, staff meetings and public presentations. The Hall will be ideal for large events, capable for seating up to 150 guests at banquet tables or more than 250 in theatre-style seating. A fully automatic, retractable acoustic partition will enable us to divide the room into two separate spaces for small-scale events and meetings.
East Meets West: Introducing the Student Center Namesakes

In August 2013, Margaret and Isaac Barpal made it possible for us to open our new Barpal Veterinary Center, a modern facility enabling state-of-the-art healthcare for our dogs. In May 2014, Keith G. Hirst made it possible for us to open our new Keith G. Hirst Canine Assessment Center, our “freshman dorm” for puppies returning for training from puppy raiser homes. With the Veterinary Center on the west side and the Assessment Center on the east, these lead donors are coming together as the generous driving forces behind our new Barpal – Hirst Student Center, right in the center of campus.

Margaret and Isaac Barpal - How one ordinary day changed everything.
It was an ordinary day when Margaret and Isaac Barpal drove past a Southeastern Guide Dogs billboard. The billboard prompted a campus visit and tour, where they witnessed a puppy being transported to an off-site veterinary clinic for treatment.

Those ordinary moments led to something extraordinary, and the Barpals pledged to help build our well-equipped veterinary center. Their generosity led the way, and the vision became a reality. Thanks to the Barpals, our dogs receive the best health care possible right here on campus.
Message from our Lead Donors

Dear Friends,

When Southeastern Guide Dogs approached us to help build a new home for its students and staff, we knew it was time to act.

Together, we have enthusiastically pooled our resources and individually pledged $1,500,000—for a combined $3 million—to do our best on behalf of Southeastern Guide Dogs. We were well aware and fully agree that there is an obvious need for a modern and up-to-date, larger, central activity building to be located in the heart of the campus. Our hope is also a confident vote that this foundational gift provides the momentum to raise the balance of the funds necessary for the construction of another “dream come true” new building.

We are thrilled to report that other donors of Southeastern Guide Dogs already have joined us in providing their financial support, which means we are well on our way to success. Their pledges are an additional $4.5 million—fantastic news! Now with $7.5 million in gifts and commitments we are $1 million away from our goal to complete this $8.5 million Barpal - Hirst Student Center.

It’s a lofty goal. But it is also for an extraordinary and fine organization—and we are counting on your kindness and generosity to make it happen. Thank you for caring and giving. Your gift is about people, it changes lives and helps build this new facility. When you give toward this important project, you are investing long-term in a brighter tomorrow at Southeastern Guide Dogs.

Thank you and warm regards,

Margaret Barpal      Isaac Barpal      Keith G. Hirst

Keith G. Hirst - “Growth well into the future” in his mission.
The namesake behind our new Canine Assessment Center, Sarasota’s Keith G. Hirst of Palmer Ranch grew up in Decatur, Michigan. He remembers college life at Michigan State University and the family dog he left behind. After a dual major in advertising and journalism with a minor in economics, he landed a spot as editor of a weekly newspaper in Southern Indiana. He then served as a Public Information Officer and captain in the U.S. Army; spent 20 years with Booth newspapers in Michigan; and then moved to Florida, still active in his second career as a long-term investor. Keith believes in setting goals, developing a plan, and pursuing excellence, the very ideals needed to raise and train a guide dog. Keith and Southeastern Guide Dogs make quite a team.
Dear Friends,

It’s beyond exciting to move forward with our new Barpal – Hirst Student Center. Our incredible dogs are changing lives—lives that matter. And while we’re striving to make our new Student Center a beautiful home-away-from-home, we’re also impacting the future.

As we increase the quality of our current services, we’re also increasing our capacity for long-term growth—and that’s important.

Looking ahead several years, the new Student Center will help us create approximately 100 new guide dog teams each year and provide extensive support to more than 500 guide dog teams annually. The facility will also enable us to place more than 50 dogs each year into other valuable careers benefitting veterans as well as children with visual impairments.

We estimate that this facility will help Southeastern Guide Dogs provide services to over 10,000 students—visually impaired people and veterans—over the next 40 to 50 years.

With your help, we’re giving the priceless gift of independence to greater numbers of deserving people. Your gift will help change lives for years to come!

Warm regards,

Titus Herman
Chief Executive Officer

Long-term Impact:
Message from the CEO

Dr. Tom is also a loving husband and father, and a caring mentor to his students. The word “success” defines him in every way, and yet he claims he hasn’t done it alone. A four-legged assistant helps him at every step.

We met Dr. Tom in 1991 when he arrived on our campus for his first guide, Blake. He’s currently paired with his third guide, Cate, a beautiful black and tan Labrador. Dr. Tom says Cate is one of the most important things in his life.

Blind for most of his adult life, Tom boasts impeccable credentials and teases about his accomplishments; “I did it with my eyes closed!”
November 1, 2014

As a professor at a major university, I know firsthand how a campus creates the atmosphere for learning. A campus makes a statement about the values of a school, about how the organization prioritizes its students and manages the learning process. As an academician, I've devoted my life to best practices in the education of my students.

And as a visually impaired graduate of Southeastern Guide Dogs, I care deeply about the betterment of this worthy school's campus—and the new Barpal – Hirst Student Center.

When students leave home for any campus, they face the challenges of adapting to everything new—new routines, new people, and new information. Their new dormitory and student center becomes a home away from home; a place where they learn as well as live, dine, socialize, and sleep. Visually impaired students experience all of this “newness overload” with the added stressors of acclimating without sight.

I remember my first visit to Southeastern Guide Dogs, and how I had to adjust to campus and my new dog. The school did a wonderful job of helping our class get around the old building and care for our dogs. As we were getting a tour of the place, I could tell that the building had been added to over the years.

My experience was excellent and I can only imagine the difference a new student center will make. Designing a building precisely to meet the needs of visually impaired students and our dogs shows a tremendous respect and value for the people, the pups, and the learning process. A student center designed to facilitate everything—learning, living, dining, caring for our dogs—it sounds like a dream come true.

I don’t want to think about the day my guide dog Cate retires. But when that day comes and I return to campus to stay, I know my home away from home will be incredible. Will you help make it happen?

Sincerely,

Dr. Thomas G. Weidner, PhD, ATC, FNATA

Dr. Thomas G. Weidner, PhD, ATC, FNATA

George and Frances Ball Distinguished Professor and Chair
School of Physical Education, Sport, and Exercise Science
Ball State University
Message from the Chairman of the Board

Dear Friends,

Members of the Board of Directors volunteer for this exceptional organization because we want to create the best experience for our students and dogs. We’re here because we care, and care deeply.

And we care not only about the students of today, but we consider those who will someday experience the freedom and gifts offered. The students and dogs of tomorrow are at the forefront as we make decisions about the direction, growth, and health of the school.

And that’s why I’m pleased to report that we are personally donating to the new Barpal – Hirst Student Center with 100% Board participation. Our Philanthropy Committee reports that each Board Member has made an individual contribution that is personally meaningful, with cheerful enthusiasm.

I’m asking you to join our excitement and commitment, and to make a contribution that is personally meaningful. Small or large, your donations impact our ability to see this dream come to fruition.

Thank you for standing with us!

Warm regards,

Kathleen E. Riley
Chairman of the Board
At age 12, Alyson Mitts experienced the unimaginable. Diagnosed with Stargardt’s disease, this shy young lady experienced loss of center sight, loss of depth perception, color blindness, and phantom vision. At night, Alyson couldn’t see at all.

By age 15, Alyson was sleeping in her mother’s room and habitually following her around the house. Being alone in the dark was just too scary.

When her mom, Tracy, learned about Southeastern Guide Dogs’ Canine Connections program, she called immediately. “When I mentioned to Alyson about getting a dog, she cried tears of joy,” said her mom. “She said she would cuddle in her own bed with her puppy by her side.”

The day our trainer arrived with Sandy, a gentle black Labrador, they were greeted with excited screams. With Sandy by her side, Alyson slept in her own room that night for the first time in over a year.

With Sandy’s help, Alyson gained the independence and skills needed to one day make a successful guide dog team. And now as Alyson approaches adulthood, that “one day” is just around the corner.

Alyson is one of our students of tomorrow. Will you help her have an amazing experience? When you help us build our Barpal – Hirst Student Center, you’re giving students like Alyson an incredible and lasting gift, because freedom starts here.
This may look like an architectural floor plan to you, but to us, it looks like accessibility. It looks like easy navigation and attention to every detail. It looks like a combination of the thoughtfulness and wisdom that comes from over 30 years’ experience working with the visually impaired. It looks like careful planning and the results of understanding what our students go through and what they need for convenient navigation, enhanced learning, comfortable living, and considerate caring for their dogs.

Yes, it’s a floor plan for our new Barpal – Hirst Student Center. But to us—and to them—it’s so much more. It’s a symbol of respect and the value we place on each student’s experience. It’s a dream—and you can help make it a reality.

Support the Barpal – Hirst Student Center today, and you’ll show your compassion for the deserving students of tomorrow.
Dear Friends,

People who know me have heard me say, “If I had to choose between getting back my vision—but I’d have to give up my guide dog—I’d choose my dog.”

I don’t have that freedom of choice, but I do have Carson. I love him, and without him I wouldn’t have the freedom I do enjoy; freedom to get up and go.

I’m Suzy Wilburn, the Director of Admissions and Graduate Services. I wear many hats as liaison with applicants and students. I’m a staff member and a graduate who understands what other people with visual impairments are going through.

It can be unsettling and stressful for our applicants to leave everything and stay here for 26 days. It’s reassuring to me that this new Student Center will make their stay as pleasant, meaningful, and comfortable as possible.

I’ve seen ongoing improvements over the years, and the new Barpal – Hirst Student Center is one of the most exciting projects yet. To me it represents future freedom, for myself and for our graduates. And that freedom starts here, when you help us make it happen. Please support our new Barpal – Hirst Student Center today.

Warm regards,

Susan Wilburn
Director of Admissions and Graduate Services
A philosophy professor fills a large jar with big rocks. "Is it full?" he asks his students. Most agree; it’s full.

Next, he takes out a bag of pebbles and pours it around the rocks. "Now is it full?" They wait.

He pours a bag of sand among the pebbles, and now the students are convinced. "It’s full!" they say.

Finally he pulls out a bottle of water, filling in every crevasse among the sand, pebbles, and rocks. No one can argue; the jar is now full.

Today we’re asking you to help us fill our jar, and it’s going to take donations of every size to make it happen.

Building a $8.5 million facility to better serve our students and their guide dogs takes a community of generous people. Everyone is invited—and needed! Whether you can share a large rock, a small pebble, a handful of sand, or a bucketful of blessing, we’re asking for your help. And together, we’ll make a difference. Together, we’ll fill our jar and create something beautiful—the new Barpal – Hirst Student Center, a place where freedom begins.
Recognition Opportunities

Just as our extraordinary dogs are transforming lives, your extraordinary generosity is building a legacy. Southeastern Guide Dogs presents several opportunities to leave your own legacy through a naming recognition in our new Barpal – Hirst Student Center. In addition to these naming opportunities, we will showcase donations of $1,000 or more on a Wall of Recognition.

As you consider the important role you’ll play in creating this welcoming and comfortable learning environment for our students, several opportunities are available (on a “first-come, first-served” basis) and detailed here.

If preferred, commitments of $5,000 or more may be fulfilled over a five-year period.

Thank you in advance for your gracious giving in this worthwhile effort to serve our visually impaired students. As this project takes shape, we look forward to seeing your name reflected as a symbol of your caring and lasting friendship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognition Opportunity</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Residence Wing*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrative Wing*</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dining Hall</td>
<td>$250,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outdoor Courtyard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial-Grade Kitchen*</td>
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<td>Reception Atrium*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Classroom*</td>
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<td>Large Conference Room*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Center Terrace</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Rooms (12)**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Covered Obedience Training Area*</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensory Garden</td>
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<tr>
<td>Covered Porch*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small Conference Room*</td>
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<td>Student Lounges (2)**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Wing Portico</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dog Play Yard*</td>
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<td>Student Verandas (12)**</td>
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<td>Elevator*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Laundry Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Business Center*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trainers’ Office</td>
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<td>Housekeeping Center</td>
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<td>Dog Grooming Station*</td>
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<td>Administrative Department Offices (7)</td>
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<td>Break Room</td>
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<td>Dining Storage</td>
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<td>Server Room*</td>
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*Fulfilled  **Six fulfilled, six available  ***One fulfilled, one available  ****One fulfilled, eleven available
A native of Ellenton just a few miles from campus, Britt Leblanc-Simard noticed trainers out working with guide dogs for years. When she lost her vision a year ago from a neurological disease, she turned to Southeastern Guide Dogs.

It was challenging to juggle childcare and responsibilities, but Britt left home for our 26-day marathon of training with an affectionate black Labrador named Barker. Recent graduates, Britt and Barker are now inseparable.

As a stay-at-home mom of four children under nine, Britt is on the go. Soccer games, gymnastics, school functions, outdoor adventures, and doctor visits fill the calendar. With a busy family and packed schedule, Britt is thrilled to have Barker by her side.

“My seven-year-old has been my guide,” she says. “Now I can let her be a kid and not worry about me. I don’t want to let my disability affect my kids, and Barker is making sure of that. I’m more confident going places. It’s amazing how much Barker has changed my life in such a short time!”

When students like Britt have the courage to leave home, we’d like to give them the best home away from home. Britt and others like her have worked hard to overcome much. Let’s give them the world-class facility they deserve.