# FACTS

## About Southeastern Guide Dogs

**Contents**

- Mailing Address & Phone ................................................................. 2
- Who We Are in 30 Seconds or Less ...................................................... 2
- About Southeastern Guide Dogs – for Press Releases .............................. 2
- Mission .............................................................................................. 2
- Vision ................................................................................................ 2
- Core Values ....................................................................................... 2
- Overview of Southeastern Guide Dogs ..................................................... 3
- The Southeastern Guide Dogs Creed ....................................................... 3
- Career Paths of our Superheroes .......................................................... 4
- Dogs Benefitting Veterans ..................................................................... 6
- Numbers and People ........................................................................... 6
- Locations and Campus .......................................................................... 7
- Activities and Volunteer Opportunities .................................................. 7
Mailing Address & Phone
Southeastern Guide Dogs
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Who We Are in 30 Seconds or Less
Southeastern Guide Dogs transforms lives by creating and nurturing extraordinary partnerships between people and dogs. We train dogs of the highest pedigree for people who are blind and for veterans, providing our premier dogs and lifetime services at no cost, without any government funding.

About Southeastern Guide Dogs – for Press Releases
Southeastern Guide Dogs transforms lives by creating and nurturing extraordinary partnerships between people and dogs. Employing the latest in canine development and behavior research, the national organization trains guide dogs, service dogs and companion dogs for people living with significant challenges including those with visual impairments and veterans with disabilities.

All of Southeastern Guide Dogs’ services – which include selective breeding and expert dog training; comprehensive on-campus student instruction; and lifetime graduate follow-up – are provided at no cost to the recipients. The charity relies 100% on private donations and receives no government funding. Southeastern Guide Dogs has the distinction of being dually accredited by the two premier, global accreditation bodies: the International Guide Dog Federation and Assistance Dogs International.


Mission
Our mission is to transform lives by creating and nurturing extraordinary partnerships between people and dogs.

Vision
Our vision is to be the best service dog school in the world.

Core Values
- Respect for one another
- A culture of excellence and innovation
- Uncompromising integrity and transparency
- A passion for the care and wellbeing of our dogs
- Mindful stewardship of our precious resources
Overview of Southeastern Guide Dogs

- Southeastern Guide Dogs is one of the most respected guide dog schools in the United States, and the only one in the Southeast.
- The school is dually accredited by the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) and Assistance Dogs International (ADI), the premier global accreditation bodies.
- Our guide and service dogs provide independence, confidence, and dignity to our visually impaired students and to veterans with disabilities.
- We breed, raise, and train Labrador retrievers, golden retrievers, and a mix of the two called a “goldador.”
- Our four-legged superheroes weave the fabric of our organization. Guide dogs, service dogs, facility therapy dogs, breeder dogs, and others transform the lives of our students and graduates.
- Our dogs’ education, socialization, and training strategies follow clear career paths from preschool to graduation to a meaningful career to retirement.
- At about two years, qualified guide dogs are carefully matched with individuals based on pace, pull, temperament, and home environment. Our service dogs are matched with veterans living with post-traumatic stress disorder and other disabilities such as hearing loss, seizures, and balance issues.
- Our visually impaired students live and learn on campus for 20 days, learning to travel independently and walk safely. They stay in tastefully appointed private rooms with private baths, and dine in our dining hall. Veterans receiving service dogs live and learn on campus for 11 days, learning the commands that mitigate symptoms of disabilities.
- All of our dogs and services, including follow up for the lifetime of the pair, are provided at no cost to our students and alumni.
- We receive no government funds.

The Southeastern Guide Dogs Creed

We believe people with visual impairments and veterans with disabilities deserve hope, confidence, and independence. Our mission is to transform lives by creating and nurturing extraordinary partnerships between people and dogs.

Because of our deep and heartfelt commitment to our students and alumni, our vision is to be the best service dog school in the world. And what makes us different is that we believe it’s possible.

We believe our cutting-edge genetics and reproduction work can weave together the delicacies of art with the data of science to create healthier, smarter dogs with hearts of gold.

We believe our innovative early education and puppy raising protocols can provide a wealth of positive, real-life experiences to create dogs that love people and love to learn.
We believe our pioneering training practices, certified by the two most prestigious international accreditation bodies, can create the finest service dogs in the world.

We believe our culture of excellence—fueled by the dedication of our staff and volunteers and the generosity of our donors—will propel us forward to be the best so our students and alumni can be their best. They deserve our utmost efforts to change the world, one dog at a time.

**Career Paths of our Superheroes**

As we pursue excellence within the realm of service dog organizations, our education, socialization, and training strategies follow clear career paths from preschool to graduation to a meaningful career to retirement.

**Puppy Academy: preschool and kindergarten**
Puppies are bred and born on our campus. At just a few days old, they begin their education as they are tickled, stretched, stimulated, and socialized. At four weeks, our formal puppy education preschool program introduces multisensory sights, sounds, scents, surfaces, and everyday objects. At six weeks, our public Puppy Kindergarten Adventure program builds confidence through problem-solving exercises and multisensory play-with-a-purpose.

**Puppy raisers: boarding school, 1st – 12th grades**
At 10 weeks, puppies go to boarding school to be educated by individual teachers, our volunteer puppy raisers, who teach basic obedience and house manners in a loving home environment. Twice monthly community excursions and personalized training with local puppy raiser groups provide socialization and instill confidence as puppies experience the big, wide world.

**Canine Assessment Center: freshman orientation**
At 14 – 18 months, puppies leave boarding school and head off to freshman orientation, returning to our campus for higher education. Freshman orientation takes place at our Canine Assessment Center, where assessments begin to reveal their ideal major.

**Canine University: pursuing a major**
As our dogs progress in their education and enter our formal training program at Canine University, each one’s unique aptitude and abilities become clear. Dogs find a major based on their personality, health, temperament, trainability, and suitability for specific careers. At Southeastern Guide Dogs, the majority of our dogs specialize in one of the following career paths:

- **Guide dog major:** After about six months of formal harness training plus 20 days of student-handler training, dogs that graduate as guide dogs provide independence and confidence to people with visual impairments.

- **Service dog major:** After about six months of formal training plus 11 days of student-handler training, dogs that graduate as service dogs provide
independence and confidence to veterans with disabilities such as post-traumatic stress disorder, hearing loss, seizure alert, or balance issues.

- **Facility therapy dog major**: Dogs that are hand-selected for this career live with military staff members and provide therapeutic services to veterans and families being treated in military medical facilities or working in high-stress military environments across the nation.

- **Genetics and reproduction major**: Dogs that are hand-selected as breeders preserve the quality and diversity of the lines through selective breeding. Volunteer host families welcome these dogs into their homes.

- **Gifted Canines major, with minor emphases**:
  - Emotional support dogs: Dogs that are hand-selected as emotional support dogs provide therapeutic comfort to veterans with disabilities. Emotional support dogs enjoy certain legal access regarding housing and air travel.
  - Canine Connection dogs: Dogs that are hand-selected for this career become companions for youth with visual impairments, building a bridge to a future guide dog. Canine Connection dogs are adopted by the family of the visually impaired child.
  - Gold Star Family dogs: Recognizing the sacrifices made when a family member dies in service to the nation, Southeastern Guide Dogs offers well-behaved, loving companion dogs to Gold Star families in need.
  - Military family dogs: As a tribute to the respect, honor, and shared sacrifices of family members, Southeastern Guide Dogs offers loving, friendly dogs to military personnel and their families.
  - Public service dogs: Dogs that are hand-selected for public service serve in law enforcement careers such as bomb, arson, firearms, and drug detection. Public service dogs are donated to local law enforcement agencies who then refine their training for their chosen mission.
  - Ambassador dogs: Dogs that are hand-selected as ambassadors are adopted by active volunteers, enabling outreach and education to further the Southeastern Guide Dogs mission.

**Graduation and alumni support**
After graduation, we follow up with our dogs for the life of the teams. Handlers sign a contract agreeing to maintain the dog’s health and wellness, and our Graduate Services Department provides follow-up training and support for all our alumni.

**Retirement**
When our dogs retire, handlers may choose to keep their dog as a pet for the rest of its life. If the handler is unable to care for the retired dog, a family member or personal friend of the handler may choose to adopt the retired dog, allowing continued access between the handler and the dog. If the handler is unable to find a comfortable and safe
home, Southeastern Guide Dogs can place the dog back with its original puppy raiser or with an adoptive family, one that is pre-screened and has expressed willingness to care for a retired career dog.

**Dogs Benefitting Veterans**

Our veterans’ programs include dogs placed in the following careers:

- Guide dogs
- Service dogs
- Facility therapy dogs
- Emotional support dogs
- Gold Star family dogs
- Military family dogs

**Numbers and People**

- **18**: the minimum age for our guide dog handlers. There is no maximum age, but handlers must be physically able to care for their dog.
- **20**: the number of days our visually impaired students live on campus, learning to navigate with their guide dogs. Service dog classes for veterans are for **11 days**.
- **Over 500**: The number of active guide dog and service dog teams we provide services and support for each year.
- **Over 100**: New guide and service dog teams created each year.
- **Over 3,000**: The number of guide dog and service dog teams we’ve created since inception.
- **> 130**: the number of staff members employed here.
- **> 750**: the number of core volunteers who donate time at least one day per week. Volunteers assist by raising puppies, hosting breeder dogs, handling ambassador dogs, caring for dogs in our kennels, assisting with puppy education, offering administrative and special event support, and fundraising. Our Board of Directors is comprised of volunteers. That number increases to about 1,000 volunteers when adding our annual Walkathon volunteers. We estimate the value of our volunteers’ service hours at more than $12 million.
- **$Tens of thousands**: the cost to breed, raise, train, and match our guide dogs with students, and follow up with our teams for life.
- **$0**: the amount our students pay for their dogs. We support our graduates for the lifetime of the teams, and provide all of our services at no cost to recipients.
- **$0**: the amount of government funding we receive. Zero. We are a non-profit organization and receive no federal, state, or local funding; instead, we rely
on the generosity of friends and supporters who donate to impact our puppies and the people who need them.

Locations and Campus

- Our **campus** is located on 33 landscaped acres in Palmetto, near I-75 and I-275. Our facilities include the Barpal - Hirst Student Center, the Margaret and Isaac Barpal Veterinary Center, the Grant and Shirle Herron Puppy Academy, the Keith G. Hirst Canine Assessment Center. Our new Canine University, replacing the old training kennel, is under construction with expected completion in summer 2018.

- When students start training with their dogs, they spend their first week practicing on our secluded Freedom Walk. Their first venture off campus is out of our Bradenton training center—known as the DTC for “downtown training center”—where they practice curbs and navigation in a residential setting.

Activities and Volunteer Opportunities

- Our volunteers make all the difference in helping us achieve our mission. About 300+ on-campus volunteers make a genuine impact.

- Volunteer **puppy raisers** “foster” puppies from ages 10 weeks to 14–18 months, allowing our puppies to become comfortable with home life, learn basic obedience, and begin to experience the world. It’s quite a commitment! For detailed information including an online checklist and application, visit Guidedogs.org.

- To support our breeding program, we partner with selected volunteer **breeder hosts** who host our breeder dogs in their homes as part of their family. Hosts’ main responsibility involves transporting breeders to campus when needed for breeding and whelping. Visit Guidedogs.org to apply to be a breeder host.

- The **Puppy Kindergarten Adventure** program builds stronger neural pathways and creates confidence, coordination, and competence in our puppies. Puppy kindergarten fills puppies’ memory banks with the multisensory magic of shapes, colors, textures, scents, sounds, motion, surfaces…plus adventure, love, and interaction with new people. Puppy Kindergarten Adventure may be reserved for a $25 fee, with sessions limited to seven guests.

- We offer an educational activity for larger groups, the **Creation of a Superhero**. This informative, multimedia presentation begins with an educational talk about what it takes to create our guide dogs for the visually impaired and service dogs for veterans with disabilities. Guests learn about the fascinating steps our dogs take from puppyhood to adulthood, how we
train them, and how we match them with those in need of freedom and confidence. Visitors are inspired as they hear from one of our graduates about what a difference a dog makes.

- Our annual **Walkathons** represent our biggest fundraisers of the year. Volunteers sign up to participate, and we rely on the proceeds to help us raise, train, and match our amazing dogs with our students and veterans, people whose lives are transformed by new levels of independence and freedom. Our Walkathons have expanded to eight Florida cities and attracted major business sponsorships, creating visibility, buzz, and a tail-wagging reputation for participating organizations. Walkathons take place in Tampa, St. Petersburg, Bradenton, Sarasota, Lakewood Ranch, Fort Myers, Orlando, and Polk County in Lakeland. Visit GuideDogsWalkathon.org for details.