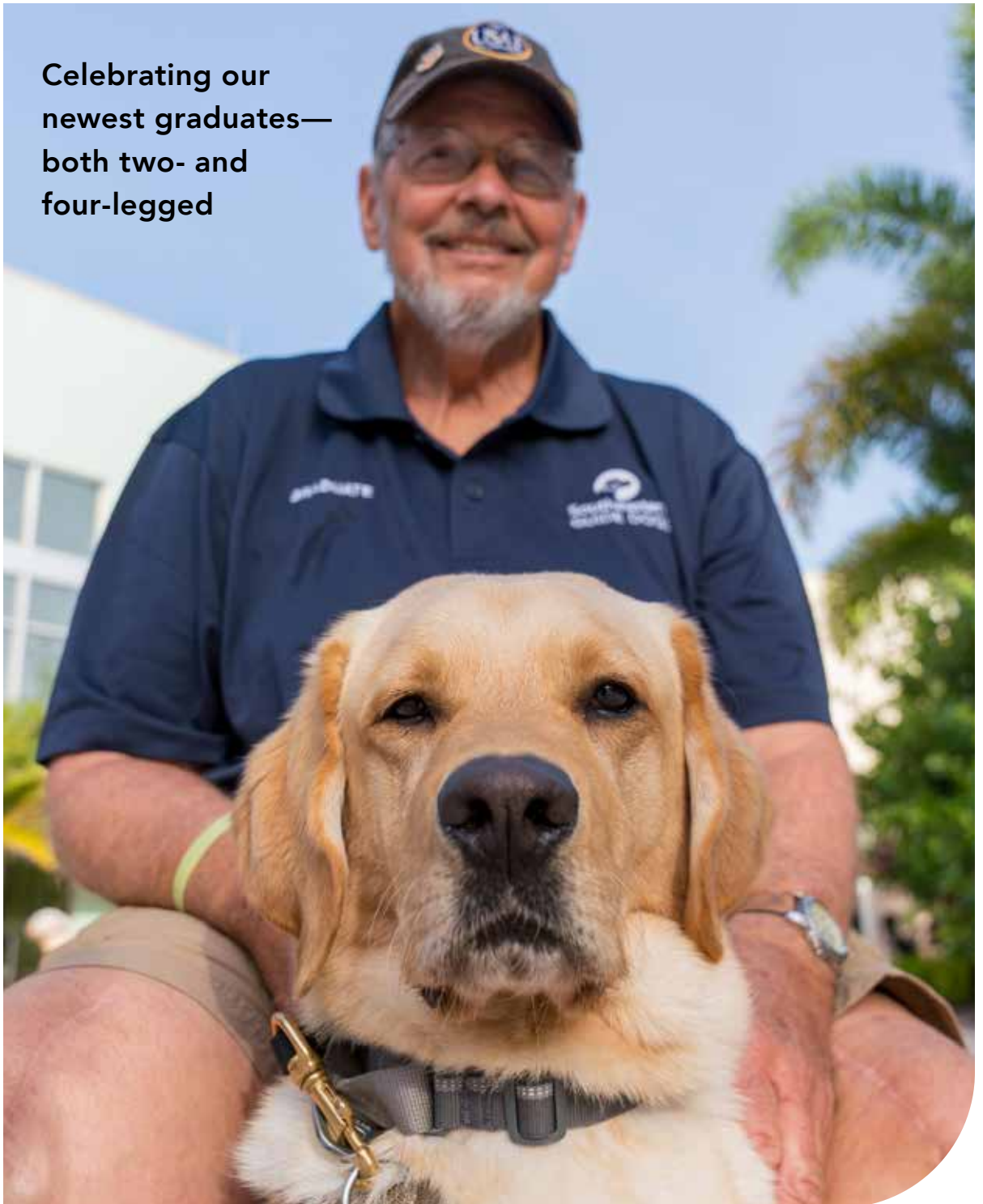


SIDE SIDE

 Southeastern
GUIDE DOGS

Celebrating our
newest graduates—
both two- and
four-legged

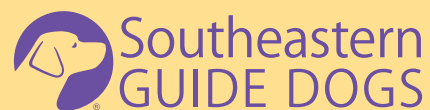


SUMMER 2022

About

SIDE by SIDE is a publication of
Southeastern Guide Dogs

Southeastern Guide Dogs transforms lives by creating and nurturing extraordinary partnerships between people and dogs. We breed, raise, and train elite guide dogs, service dogs, and skilled companion dogs and provide life-changing services for people with vision loss, veterans with disabilities, and children with significant challenges. We offer our premier dogs and lifetime follow-up services at no cost. Since 1982, we have successfully created thousands of guide and service dog teams throughout the U.S. and currently oversee the well-being of over 1,200 puppies and dogs. **GuideDogs.org.**



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Side by Side.

SOUTH TAMPA LAKELAND NORTH ORLANDO



Welcome

Dear Friend,

Every Southeastern Guide
Dogs graduate has a story
to tell.

Some overcome hardships.
Some show bravery beyond
measure. And all share inspiration and a sense of hope,
with their dogs by their sides.

Living with visible or invisible disabilities can be limiting.
But when people find freedom and confidence through
our extraordinary dogs, the future becomes brighter and
full of promise. In this issue of Side by Side, we share a
glimpse into the stories of the people we are privileged
to serve, along with photos of their intelligent, remarkable
dogs. Side-by-side with you—and all because of you—we
celebrate their new beginnings.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Titus Herman".

Titus Herman
Chief Executive Officer



Our Programs

OUR DOGS

OFFER HOPE



For people with vision loss

Guide Dogs help people with vision loss navigate independently; trained in over 40 cues.

Kids Companion Dogs are skilled companion dogs that enhance independence for children with vision loss, preparing the way for a future guide dog.



For veterans

Service Dogs help veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other disabilities; trained in 15–20 cues.

Guide Dogs help veterans with vision loss navigate independently; trained in over 40 cues.

Facility Therapy Dogs provide comfort in military medical facilities nationwide.

Emotional Support Dogs benefit veterans and help restore a more active lifestyle.

Gold Star Family Dogs comfort military family members who have lost a loved one in active service to the nation.



For children & teens


Guide Dogs help teens with vision loss—ages 15 and up—navigate independently.

Kids Companion Dogs are skilled companion dogs that enhance independence for children with vision loss, preparing the way for a future guide dog.

Gold Star Family Dogs comfort military family members who have lost a loved one in active service to the nation.



Donell Powell | Service Dog Jennie

U.S. ARMY VETERAN 
WIMAUMA, FLORIDA

Jennie was raised by Nancy Simons and Julianne Nichter.

**Patricia Rivera, Ph.D.
Facility Therapy Dog Major**

TRINKA DAVIS VETERANS VILLAGE
COMMUNITY LIVING CENTER
CARROLLTON, GEORGIA

Major and Patricia have an important job at the Atlanta Veterans Administration Health Care System's nursing home in Carrollton, Georgia. As an animal-assisted therapy team, they will serve elderly and disabled veterans who are often lonely, isolated, and anxious. As a psychologist, Patricia knows that Major's visits will offer warmth, affection, and improved well-being, and she is as eager to share his gifts as her patients are to receive them. "Major is a calming force," Patricia says. "He's just a rock."

Major was raised by Elizabeth & Bud Hilton.



**Stacey Robinson
Guide Dog Poindexter**

EAGLEVILLE, TENNESSEE

Stacey Robinson was born blind due to retinopathy of prematurity. With the help of a series of guide dogs from another school, Stacey has enjoyed navigating on her own, but after her fifth dog retired, she spent four long years without a dog.

Enter Poindexter, her easygoing, smart, and snuggly new guide dog. Now Stacey feels a greater sense of freedom with Poindexter by her side. "Even though I've never seen, having a guide dog makes me feel like I can see," she says. "It's wonderful. It makes me feel normal."

Poindexter was raised by Ansley Osborne.





Blake Wagster | Guide Dog Emma

EDGEWATER, FLORIDA

Blake Wagster ran lumber yards and pressure treating plants for a living, but after enduring a spontaneous brain bleed in 2017, he lost vision in his right eye and was reduced to only peripheral vision in the left. Retinopathy and macular degeneration also set in, so he now only sees shadows and silhouettes.

Using a white cane made him feel vulnerable and insecure. When Blake learned about Southeastern Guide Dogs from his wife, who works at the Veterans Administration Clinic in Daytona, he applied. Now he's been paired with little Emma. She may be one of the smallest guide dogs in her class, but according to her new handler, she's a "firecracker."

"She's just full of energy, and she's the sweetest little dog you ever imagined," Blake enthuses. "She's got a big heart, and I love her. I really do." With Emma as his guide, Blake feels more secure and less isolated. "I can feel the confidence growing and the insecurities kind of melt away," he reports.

Blake plans to start going to the gym again, which he and Emma can walk to from his house. And he hopes to resume a beloved hobby—surfing at nearby New Smyrna Beach. Wherever life takes him now, this graduate believes he'll be better equipped for success and happiness, saying, "I won't be alone and lonely anymore."

Emma was raised by Stephanie & Justin James.



Roger Webb | Guide Dog Brutus

SPARTANBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA

Roger Webb's glaucoma was diagnosed at age 33. In his early fifties, his eyesight deteriorated severely, and vision loss limited his lifestyle. Roger bonded quickly with his new guide dog, Brutus. "He's so strong and so smart," he says. "He's almost like my brother. He's gentle and smart, and he's laid back like me. The pairing just couldn't be any better."

Brutus was raised by Bet Levine.



"I am me again! I'm not off on the sidelines of life anymore. We're getting ready to get out there and be part of the world."

—Chris Adams | Guide Dog Aero

VENICE, FLORIDA

Aero was raised by Anina & Roy Green.



John Pangborn | Service Dog Ruth

U.S. MARINES VETERAN 
LAKELAND, FLORIDA

Six years in the Marines with deployments to Yugoslavia, the Persian Gulf, and Afghanistan affected John's mental health. He was isolating, and night terrors were persistent, so his wife suggested a service dog. Now, he's thrilled with his new buddy, Ruth. "Any kind of bad thoughts that I may have, day or night, she just knows," John says. "She brings happiness."

Ruth was raised by Jocelyn & Carl Hargrove.



"They hit it out of the ballpark. Maggie is exactly what I was looking for."

—Miguel

Miguel | Service Dog Maggie

U.S. ARMY VETERAN 
NEW MEXICO

Maggie was raised by Susan & Rob Stevenson.



Lea Gaffen Kessel | Guide Dog Marston

INDIAN HARBOR BEACH, FLORIDA

Since childhood, Lea Gaffen Kessel remembers having difficulty with night blindness and limited peripheral vision. But it wasn't until college that a retina specialist diagnosed her with retinitis pigmentosa.

Lea, a licensed clinical social worker, was employed as a school social worker in Virginia until about two years ago. Her eyesight deteriorated and extreme light sensitivity set in. Genetic testing further confirmed her condition, and Lea began using a white cane, which she thoroughly disliked. Her husband and her orientation and mobility instructor both recommended she get a guide dog. With plans to move to Florida in the works, Lea chose Southeastern Guide Dogs—even though she expected to be turned down because she was not completely blind.

To her delight, Lea was accepted and has now been matched with Marston. "She's very chill, very sweet, and very affectionate," Lea notes. Marston is her first dog, and at first Lea was nervous about receiving one that was too jumpy or energetic. But with her easy demeanor and love of working, Marston has calmed Lea's nerves. "It's fascinating how on-point she is and how she helps me avoid obstacles," Lea says. "She's doing fantastic." Together, they will go everywhere with confidence, and Lea looks forward to taking her to yoga classes and going on long walks. Lea is truly excited!



Marston was raised by Alexandra Cagle, Emily Kelsey, and Pip Dorling.

Karen Lucas | Guide Dog Reagan

MELBOURNE BEACH, FLORIDA

Don't be amazed if you're at the beach someday and see a beautiful yellow Lab enjoying a ride on a standup paddleboard alongside her happy handler. One of Karen Lucas' goals is to teach her guide dog, Reagan, how to be a chill, waterborne sidekick.

Karen is a former Maryland State Champion surfer who started rapidly losing her eyesight to glaucoma about six years ago. The stress of taking care of her terminally ill husband further deteriorated her vision, forcing her to give up driving and, eventually, surfing. Meanwhile, Karen hated using a white cane. But it wasn't until she began to trip over holes in the sand at the beach, experienced a scary encounter with a car at a street corner, and found her sleep invaded by anxiety nightmares that she thought about getting a guide dog.

Now a sweet, smart, and alert social butterfly named Reagan has become Karen's perfect match. She can feel the return of her mojo and her smile. "Oh, I know that life will be so much better for me with Reagan," Karen says. "I have gotten my confidence back already. I don't have to worry about falling, running into things, or stepping out in the road." Karen feels like she caught the perfect wave with Reagan, and the waters ahead will be calm.

Reagan was raised by Naveah & Rael Gonzales.





Ed Burton | Guide Dog Sully

U.S. NAVY VETERAN 🇺🇸
BRADENTON, FLORIDA

While Ed Burton served as a Navy diver and operating engineer mechanic in Vietnam, an unidentified eye inflammation caused optic nerve damage and vision loss. Ed was able to complete 28 years of active duty, but his condition worsened over time. In 2003 he was hit by a car while crossing the street, prompting him to get his first guide dog in 2005. Ed fell instantly in love when he met his new successor guide dog, Sully, a match that's physically and emotionally ideal. "Sully is a little high-packed energy gal," Ed notes, calling this petite yet powerful girl his "Alfa Romeo sports car."

Sully was raised by Cheryl & Dave Poage.

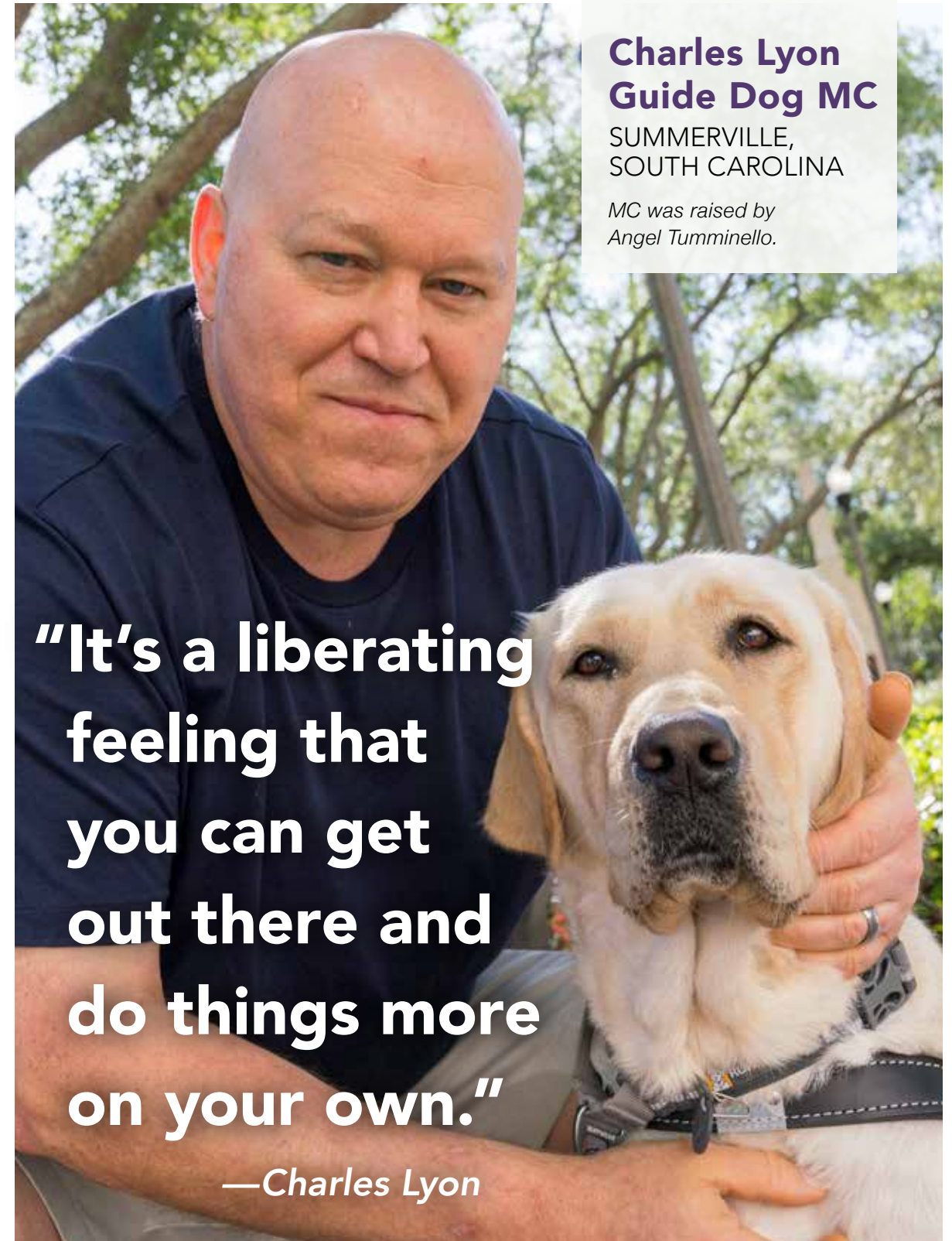


Meagen Lembcke Guide Dog Ollie

VOLGA, SOUTH DAKOTA

Meagen Lembcke was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa at 22, and now cataracts have reduced her eyesight to just a tiny bit of central vision. She relied on her three kids to be her guides, but now she's ready to live more independently. Meagen's first guide dog, Ollie, evokes happy tears. "I really like her," Meagen says. "I'm just amazed at how smart she is. I think we're a perfect match." Meagen looks forward to being able to walk without fear. "I'm excited to go out by myself and know that I'm never alone and that I'm safe."

Ollie was raised by Lindsey Amos.



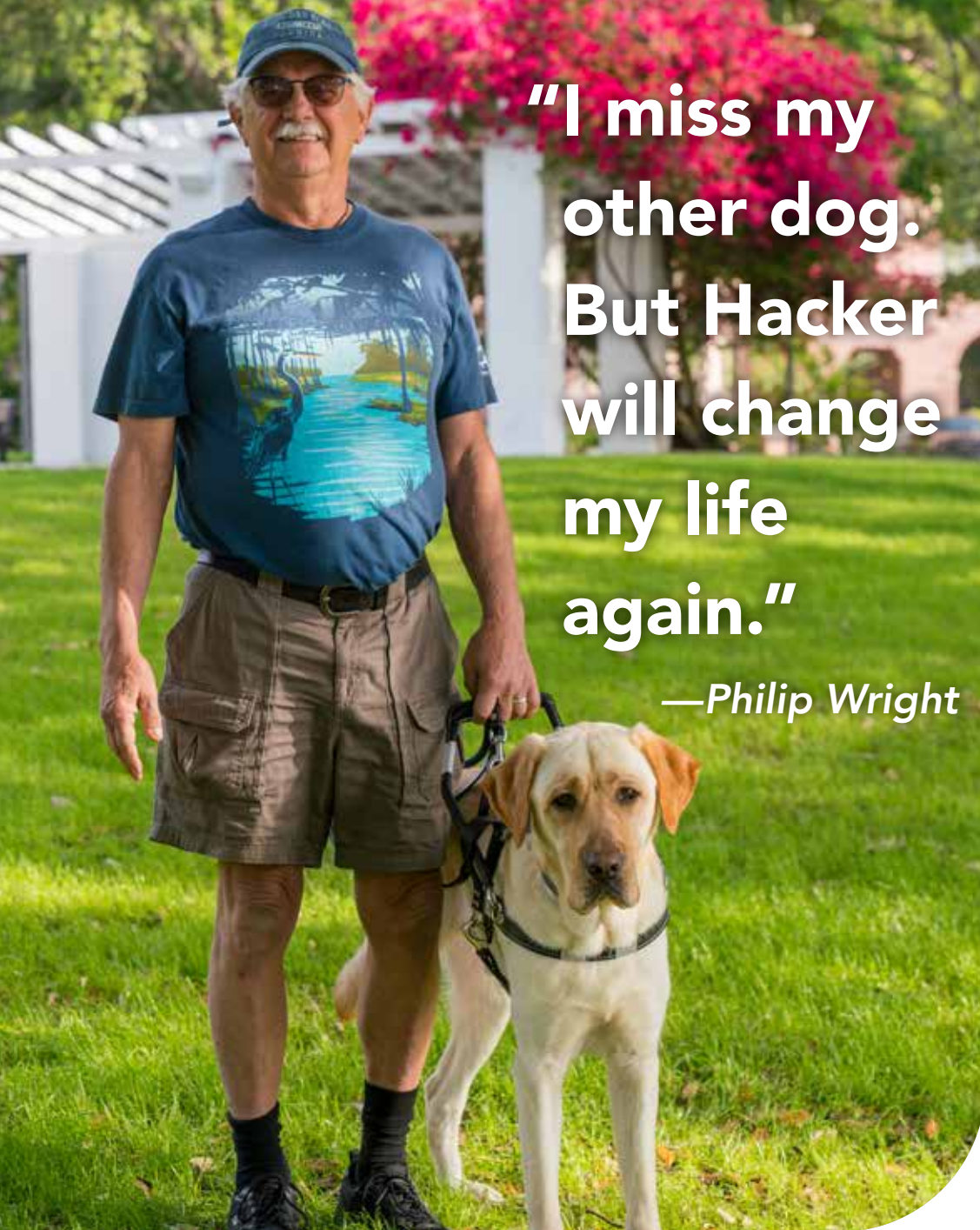
Charles Lyon Guide Dog MC

SUMMERVILLE,
SOUTH CAROLINA

*MC was raised by
Angel Tumminello.*

**"It's a liberating
feeling that
you can get
out there and
do things more
on your own."**

—Charles Lyon



**"I miss my
other dog.
But Hacker
will change
my life
again."**

—Philip Wright

Philip Wright | Guide Dog Hacker

TACCOA, GEORGIA

Hacker was raised by Dianne & Reanne Denis.

Luke | Kids Companion Dog Valor

ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA

Luke was born with a rare condition called bilateral anophthalmia, meaning his eyes did not develop in utero. Provided with prosthetic eyes, he has been blind his entire life. Luke struggled with knowing that he is different while not understanding why. To help him succeed in school, Luke's family moved to St. Augustine so he could attend the Florida School for the Blind. "And that has been exactly what we needed," says his mom, Valerie. Wanting Luke to have a guide dog in the future, she waited until he seemed mature enough to handle the responsibility of a Kids Companion Dog. And now, at age 7, a wonderful fellow named Valor has entered their lives.

"Valor is just extremely calm, quiet, and loving," Valerie notes. "I can't even imagine life without him already." Sweet and easy Valor helps lower Luke's anxiety and provides unconditional love. "Valor gives us all a little pep in our step," Valerie adds. "He's given us a happier tone in the house."

Valerie's advice is simple to parents who might be thinking about a Kids Companion Dog for their child: "Don't wait." Luke now has a sense of purpose. "It really helps him look outside of himself and feel that responsibility that makes him feel important and more confident," she stresses. "So don't wait. Start as early as possible."

Valor was raised by Laura & Michael Lawson.





Richard Draper Guide Dog Shiloh

BRADENTON, FLORIDA

Richard Draper's lifelong vision problems were discovered in kindergarten, and today he has only a bit of light perception remaining. His new guide, Shiloh, is doing a fine job. "Shiloh is very strong, and he likes to move," says Richard. "He's also very intelligent. I feel confident that he's going to be a really good guide dog."

Shiloh was raised by Jon Sperling.



*"It has just blown my mind
how much my world is
going to change."*

—Heidi Rajioppi | Guide Dog Coast
BRANDON, FLORIDA

Coast was raised by Heather Tomeo, Tim & Sue Carney.



Steve | Service Dog Milton

U.S. ARMY VETERAN 
FLORIDA

Steve served in the Army for over 22 years, including weighty responsibilities and multiple deployments. Post-traumatic stress kept Steve isolated, rarely leaving the house. Now, he's been matched with an easygoing dog named Milton. "It's been a great experience," Steve says. "Milton is a pretty calm, relaxed, and quiet dog."

Milton was raised by Kristen & Cianna Cilenti.

**"Dodger has
put a smile
on my face
that I haven't
had for a long
time. He has
brought a lot
of joy to me."**

—John Costa




John Costa | Service Dog Dodger

U.S. MARINE CORPS VETERAN 
ROTONDA WEST, FLORIDA

Dodger was raised by Patty Tidwell.

Paul Utter | Service Dog Louie

U.S. AIR FORCE VETERAN 
PALMETTO, FLORIDA

After joining the Air Force, Paul Utter's years of tragic experiences during the Vietnam era left him struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder. A close neighbor to our campus, he began volunteering in 2008, became a public speaker on our behalf, and has raised funds to sponsor and name 16 puppies. Recently, he earned recognition as the #1 fundraiser for our Suncoast Walkathon.

In 2011, Paul received his beloved service dog, Ellie, who just retired in December and is now the family pet. An intelligent Lab named Louie is now at Paul's side, offering gifts of safety, confidence, and comfort. "Louie is very eager to work and definitely a lot younger than me," Paul quips. A poor sleeper, Paul usually wakes up in the middle of the night. When Louie joins him in bed, he's able to fall back asleep. Louie has learned to help Paul with the *brace* and *retrieve* cues, which are very helpful for this veteran's bad back.

Paul offers this advice to other veterans: "If you have any desire at all to give up your isolation and lack of confidence, a service dog is the way to go," he says. "It's not like taking on a burden. It's taking on something that will give you a sense of freedom that you may not have experienced for a long time."

*Louie was raised by Susan & Nancy Newman,
Michele & Chris Koelsch.*



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Guide Dog Camp

for Teens with Vision Loss



At Guide Dog Camp, 14 to 17-year-olds with vision loss and their parents learn how our guide dogs can change a teen's life. There's no charge for this overnight, two-day camp where teens experience the freedom of walking with a guide dog, and families learn what's next in their journey toward independence.

How do teens and parents describe Guide Dog Camp in one word?



For more information or to apply, visit [GuideDogs.org/Camp](https://www.GuideDogs.org/Camp)

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The Southeastern Guide Dogs Cornerstone Society is an exceptional community of like-minded friends making a profound impact on our mission.



You're invited to join the Cornerstone Society, a group of kind and caring donors who pledge a recurring gift.

Your commitment to make a lasting difference places extraordinary dogs into the hands of people who need them.



Enjoy exclusive events and other benefits.
Join at Guidedogs.org/CS or call **941.729.5665**.



Generosity
can live
forever.



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Join the Southeastern Guide Dogs Heritage Society today
and leave a legacy that lasts.

The Heritage Society is a group of caring individuals committed to ensuring the long term stability of our school through wills and bequests.

Remembering Southeastern Guide Dogs in your will creates a legacy of kindness, and gifts of any size impact our extraordinary dogs.

Simply notify us that you have included Southeastern Guide Dogs in your will by emailing heritagesociety@guidedogs.org, and find out more at Guidedogs.org/HS.


SOUTH TAMPA


LAKELAND


NORTH ORLANDO



A BUYER'S BEST FRIEND



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and are sponsoring 2022 Havana Nights!

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