

Best Friends

ISSUE

How One Fall
Changed It All

From Fear to Friendship

When Saint Comes
Marching In

Join Our Best Friends
Challenge



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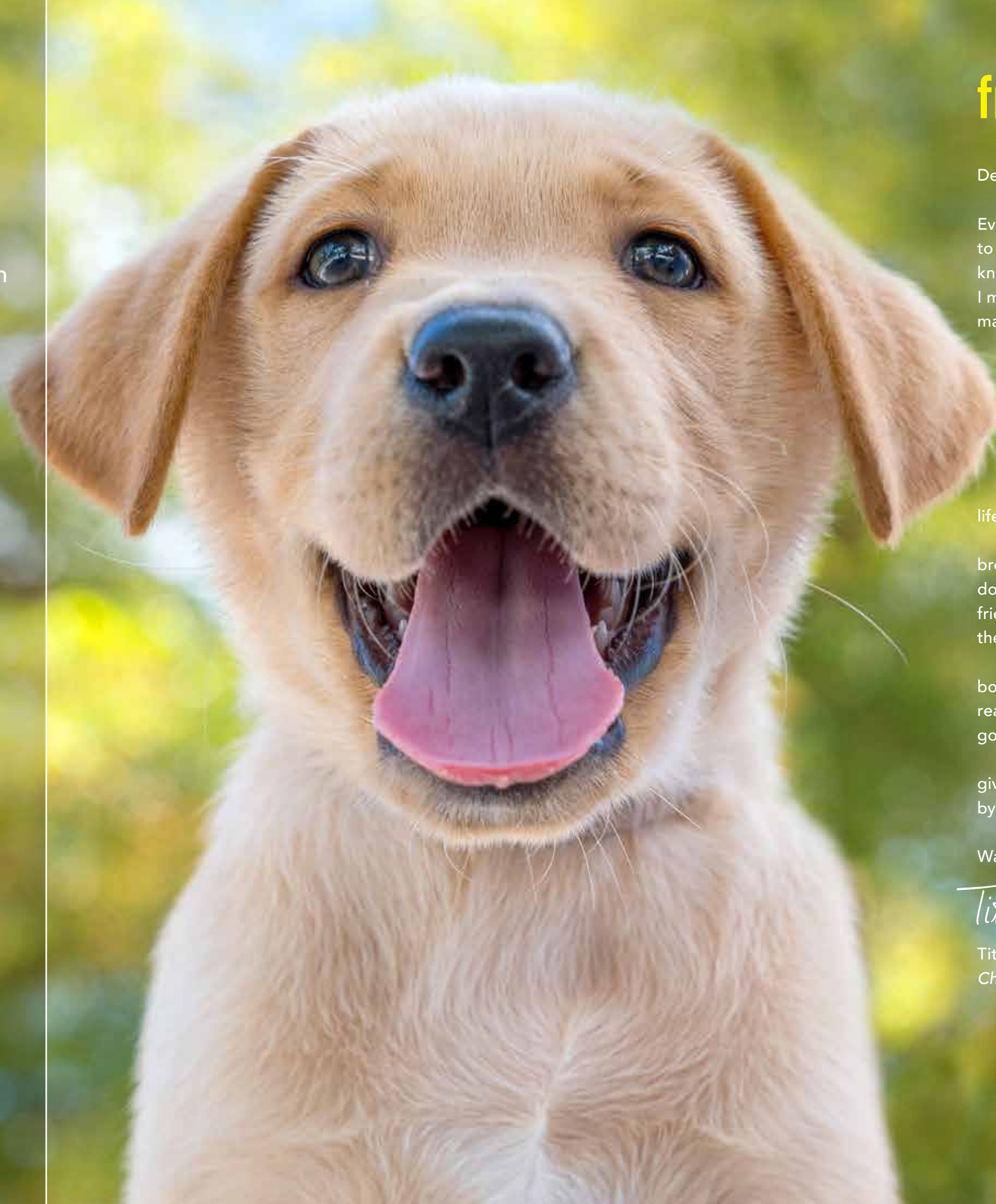
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from our CEO

Dear Supporter,

Everyone needs a friend to lean on. And do you know who's great and I mean *really* great at making friends?

Kids and dogs!

Who else but a child will grab the hand of a little person they just met and tug them toward the playground? Who else but a dog will cover a stranger with kisses at that first, life changing meeting?

For kids experiencing vision loss or the heart break of losing a loved one in military service, our dogs remind them of who they are: the kind of friends this world needs. The ones who freely give their hearts, no questions asked.

Maybe these kids, their dogs, and the special bond between them can teach us something. Like, real friends matter. And so does the love of a really good dog.

Thank you for being a real friend. Your support gives kids their childhoods back, with a best friend by their side.

Warm regards,

Titus Herman
Chief Executive Officer



MAKE A LASTING DIFFERENCE

The Southeastern Guide Dogs **Cornerstone Society** is an exceptional community of like minded friends. Members make a profound impact on our mission through a multi year commitment.

You're invited to join the **Cornerstone Society** today.



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- Benefactor** | \$5,000 - \$9,999 per year
- Visionary** | \$10,000 - \$49,999 per year
- Guardian** | \$50,000 - \$99,999 per year
- Founder** | \$100,000+ per year



Enjoy exclusive events and other benefits. Join at [GuideDogs.org/CS](https://www.guidedogs.org/CS) or call **941.729.5665**.

Life UNLEASHED

ISSUE 8

A publication of
Southeastern Guide Dogs

Our extraordinary dogs transform lives throughout the country—at no cost to recipients. What makes our pups so special? Top-notch pedigrees. And countless hours of training and love. These highly skilled wonders turn darkness into light for people with vision loss. Restore freedom for veterans. Heal broken hearts for children struggling with loss. And they never ask for anything in return. Neither do we. We offer our clients their loyal friends, expert instruction, and lifetime support completely free of charge—thanks to big-hearted donors and volunteers.



Southeastern
GUIDE DOGS

4210 77th St E. | Palmetto, FL 34221
[guidedogs.org](https://www.guidedogs.org) | 941.729.5665

from our chairman of the board

Dear Supporter,

As puppy raisers, my wife and I love to envision the future paths of the young pups entrusted to us.

Will this calm, confident dog one day bring hope and independence to someone with vision loss, or to a veteran adjusting to life outside the military? Will this intelligent, bouncy furball one day gently guide a Gold Star family through their journey of healing?

Wherever their paths take these four-legged wonders, we know their guaranteed destiny: to become someone's best friend.

Friendship can take many forms. Here at Southeastern Guide Dogs, friendship looks like wagging tails, belly rubs, and instant love, no strings attached. And thanks to you, friendship can flourish between children struggling with loss and the dogs who love and adore them.

Thank you, friends, for helping children everywhere discover the magic of friendship.

Warmest regards,

Tim Griffy
Board Chair, Southeastern Guide Dogs



Board of Directors

Members of our prestigious board of directors are dedicated to governance, strategic planning, financial management, advocacy, and resource development. This group of leaders brings passion and commitment to the organization and plays a pivotal role in our work of providing extraordinary dogs and life-changing services to the people who need them. **Members include:**

- Tim Griffy** Chair, Richardson, TX
- Vice Admiral Joe Maguire, USN (Ret.)** Vice Chair, Tampa, FL
- Kathy Saunders** Secretary, St. Petersburg, FL
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- Robert Meade** Immediate Past Chair, Sarasota, FL
- Bobby Newman** Lifetime Member, Tampa, FL
- Carol Sanders** Member, Bradenton, FL
- Harris Silverman, M.D.** Lifetime Member, Sarasota, FL

Mission Advancement Council

Our dedicated Mission Advancement Council works tirelessly to create and implement our "friendraising" strategy—forming and cultivating relationships with individuals who share our values and vision to secure the long-term success of our organization.

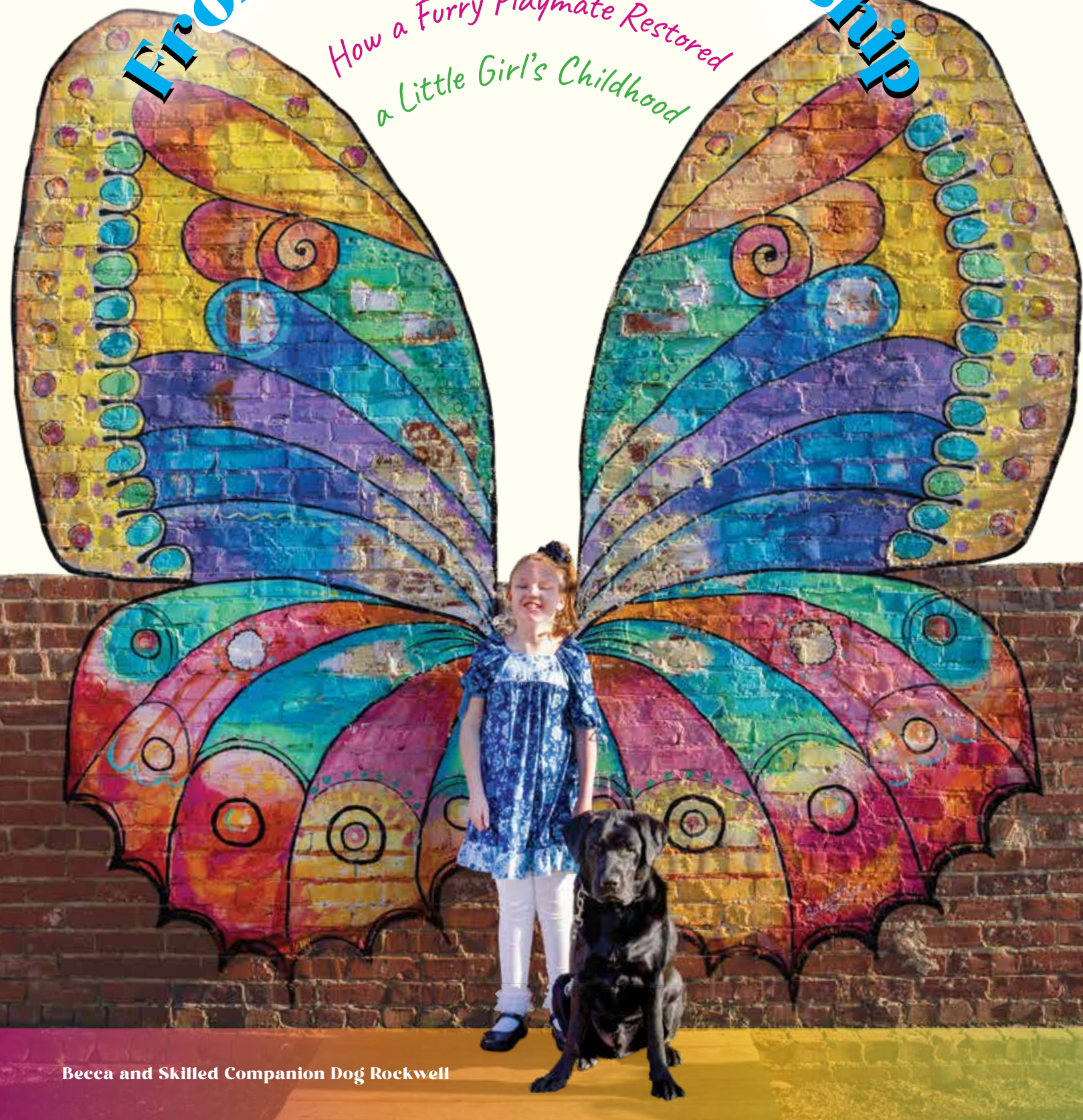
Members include:

- John Whitcomb** Chair, Tampa, FL
- Carol Sanders** Vice Chair, Bradenton, FL
- Eric Prouty** Administrator, Lakewood Ranch, FL
- Philip & Carol Beauchamp** Belleair, FL
- Leo & Trish Eineker** Bradenton, FL
- Colleen Flaherty** Parrish, FL
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- Brian & Sherry Soucy** Canton, GA

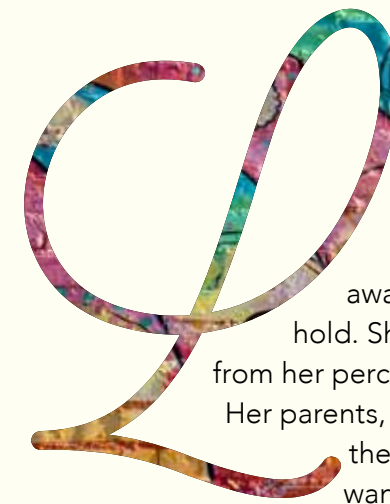


From Fear to Friendship

*How a Furry Playmate Restored
a Little Girl's Childhood*



Becca and Skilled Companion Dog Rockwell



Little Becca's world was once full of joy and adventure, but it all came crashing down when Turner Syndrome took away her sight at the tender age of eight.

Her bright, bubbly personality faded away quickly as fear and insecurity took hold. She retreated into herself, feeling safe only from her perch on the couch.

Her parents, Mina and Justin, felt heartbroken to see their little girl so changed. They desperately wanted to help but didn't know how. But when they heard about our skilled companion dogs from friends in their Boaz, Alabama community, they instantly reached out—and opened a new door for their precious daughter.

Happy-go-lucky Rockwell arrived just in time and changed everything. "My whole family believes he was the turning point for Becca," Mina says with tears of gratitude.

Rockwell gives Becca a renewed sense of purpose. She revels in knowing it's her job to care for this big, lovable pup. She feeds him. Fills his water bowl. And puts his leash on for walks. She loves playing with him, and he loves being her bestie.

And Becca's back outside again, running like the wind, owning the yard. Rockwell loves romping with the girl he loves more than anything. When Becca spins around, Rockwell keeps up. When she drops the leash, he stops and waits for her.

Mina marvels at how Rockwell teaches the entire family patience and responsibility. But mostly, she's astonished at how he impacts Becca's life.

He makes her eager, brave, and fast again. His unwavering loyalty and affection for her are matched only by hers for him.

Rockwell gives Becca daily doses of giggles, hope, and joy. These two prove that the magic of friendship comes alive in four paws, warm hugs, and all the dog kisses a best friend could ever want. ■

What's a Skilled Companion Dog?

Our skilled companion dogs offer comfort and companionship to their human partners. They provide:

- Friendship to children, teens, and adults with vision loss facing isolation.
- Hope to veterans battling with despair
- Relief to military families grappling with stress
- Love to Gold Star families coping with grief

As with all our dogs, we provide skilled companion dogs at no cost to the recipients.



Heaven Sent

Saint brings joy to a grieving military family.



"A hero never truly dies until the last time their name is spoken," says Melissa, musing softly about her husband, Jason. He's been gone for two years now.

But time blurs, and she warmly recalls treasured moments nurturing children, crafting dreams.

With unwavering devotion to his cherished family, his deep spiritual convictions, and his stellar 24 year Navy career, Jason inspired everyone around. He survived several dangerous deployments to Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan, embodying the true spirit of an American hero.

Then in a cruel twist of fate, sudden cardiac arrest snatched him away from the family he so loved. He was only 47.



MELISSA AND CHILDREN WITH GOLD STAR FAMILY DOG SAINT



“Before, we tried to stay away from our home as much as possible. We were sad with my husband and their daddy not being there. But it’s wonderful now, coming home to Saint.”

Melissa and their five children spiraled into grief. Barely holding her struggling family together, she juggled the relentless demands of single parenting by placing one tired foot in front of the other, one day at a time.

At a Gold Star widow’s retreat, this grieving mom met Jillian, whose daughter, Caleigh, found hope and healing thanks to a furry friend named Taylor. Melissa decided to seek hope for her own daughters through our Gold Star family dog program.

That’s how Saint became this family’s steadfast friend, confidante, mender of hearts, and bearer of pure joy.

This bundle of warmth makes coming home a lively celebration instead of a dismal reminder of all that was lost.

“Before, we tried to stay away from our home as much as possible,” Melissa shares. “We were sad with my husband and their daddy not being there. But it’s wonderful now, coming home to Saint.”

“When Jason left us, we adopted the idea that heaven needed a hero, and Jason must have been the hero they needed,” she adds, wiping tears. “When we found out Saint’s name, we thought it was really special. I could just see Jason in

heaven handpicking him, like, ‘You need to go love on my girls.’”

Our heaven-sent dog makes every moment brighter for this resilient family, soothing their lives with his gentle presence and his ever-wagging tail, reminding them every day that sorrows may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning.

And that a father’s love and a dog’s love never, ever end. ■

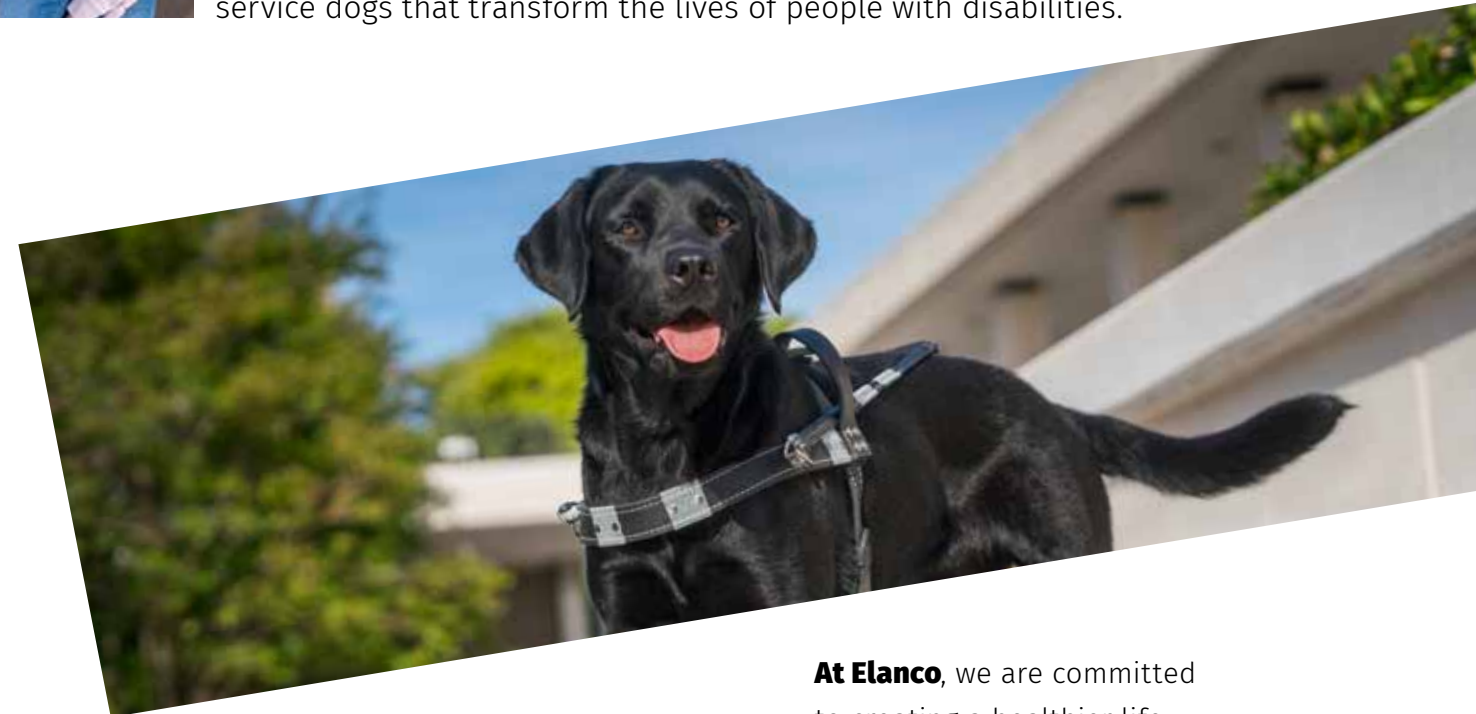


Ceremony when Jason’s name was added to the Veterans Memorial Wall in Jacksonville



Elanco is proud to be the Official Sponsor of Preventative Health Products for Southeastern Guide Dogs

We support long and healthy lives for the incredible guide dogs and service dogs that transform the lives of people with disabilities.



At Elanco, we are committed to creating a healthier life for animals everywhere. That means a more comprehensive portfolio of products along with unparalleled service and support for the health of animals, and for the good of people and the planet. **Elanco Healthy Purpose™**



COMING SOON

to a screen near you

Following up on the extraordinary successes of our YouTube viral phenomenon, *Pip*, and our heartfelt holiday feel-good, *Believe in Hope*, we can't wait to introduce you to our newest animated short, *Best Friends*.

Best Friends tells twin stories of Lucy and Chloe, using all the amazing tools and techniques of digital animation. A tribute to our Gold Star family dogs—and all dogs that make a difference—*Best Friends* will bring joy to dog lovers everywhere.

Best Friends



Once upon a time, maybe even today, a small pup named Lucy dreams of becoming a guide dog.

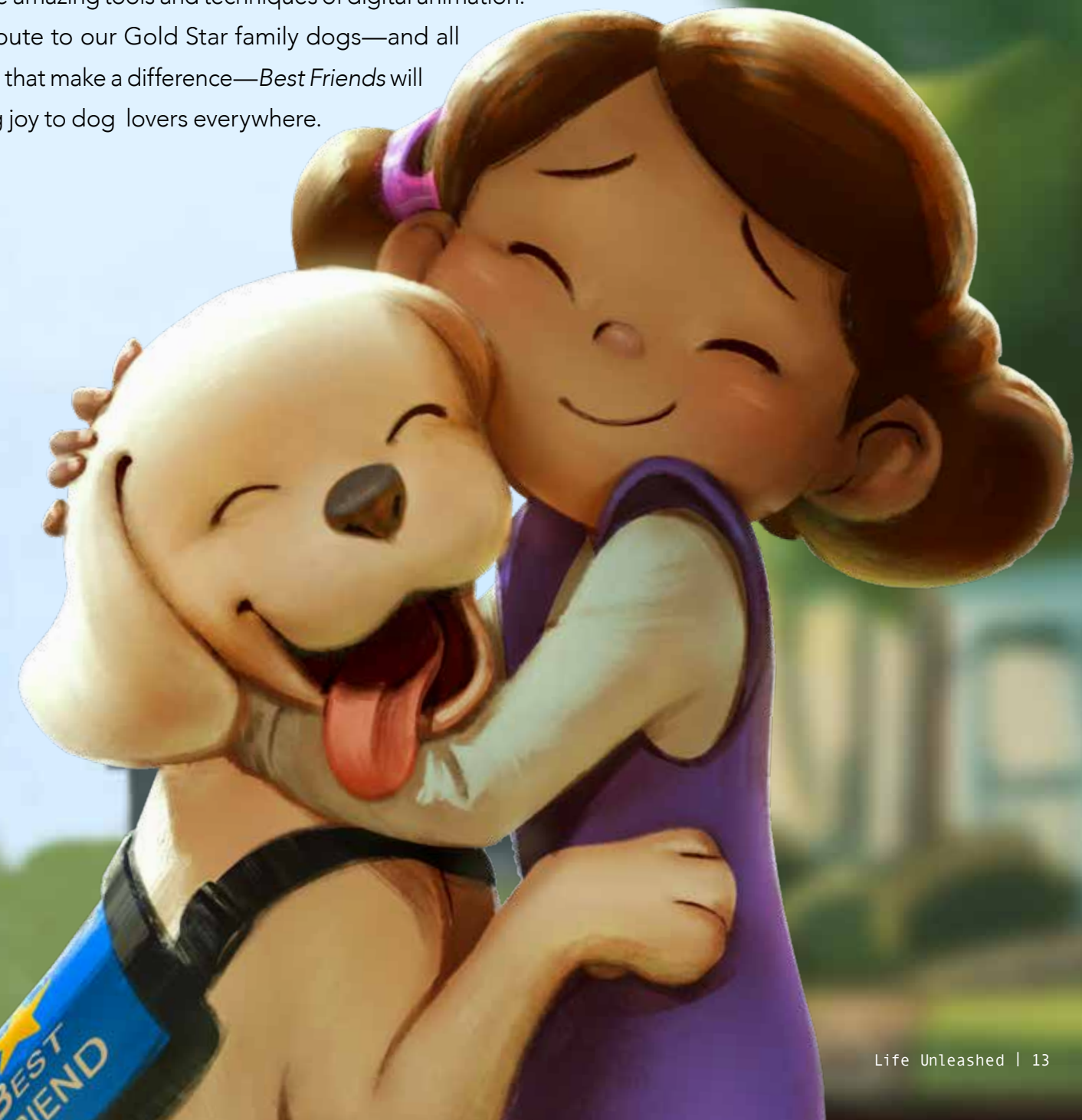
Not far away, a winsome little girl struggles to cope with painful memories of her military dad, killed in combat.

Lucy needs a purpose. A passion. Her person.

Chloe needs a best friend, a pal, a soulmate. Someone to mend her broken heart.

Watch the magic unfold as two kindred souls come together, forging an unbreakable bond in this heart-warming tale. *Best Friends*, coming to screens this summer, will remind you that like sunshine after rain, hope always blooms between two Best Friends.

Best Friends coming soon. Watch for it!

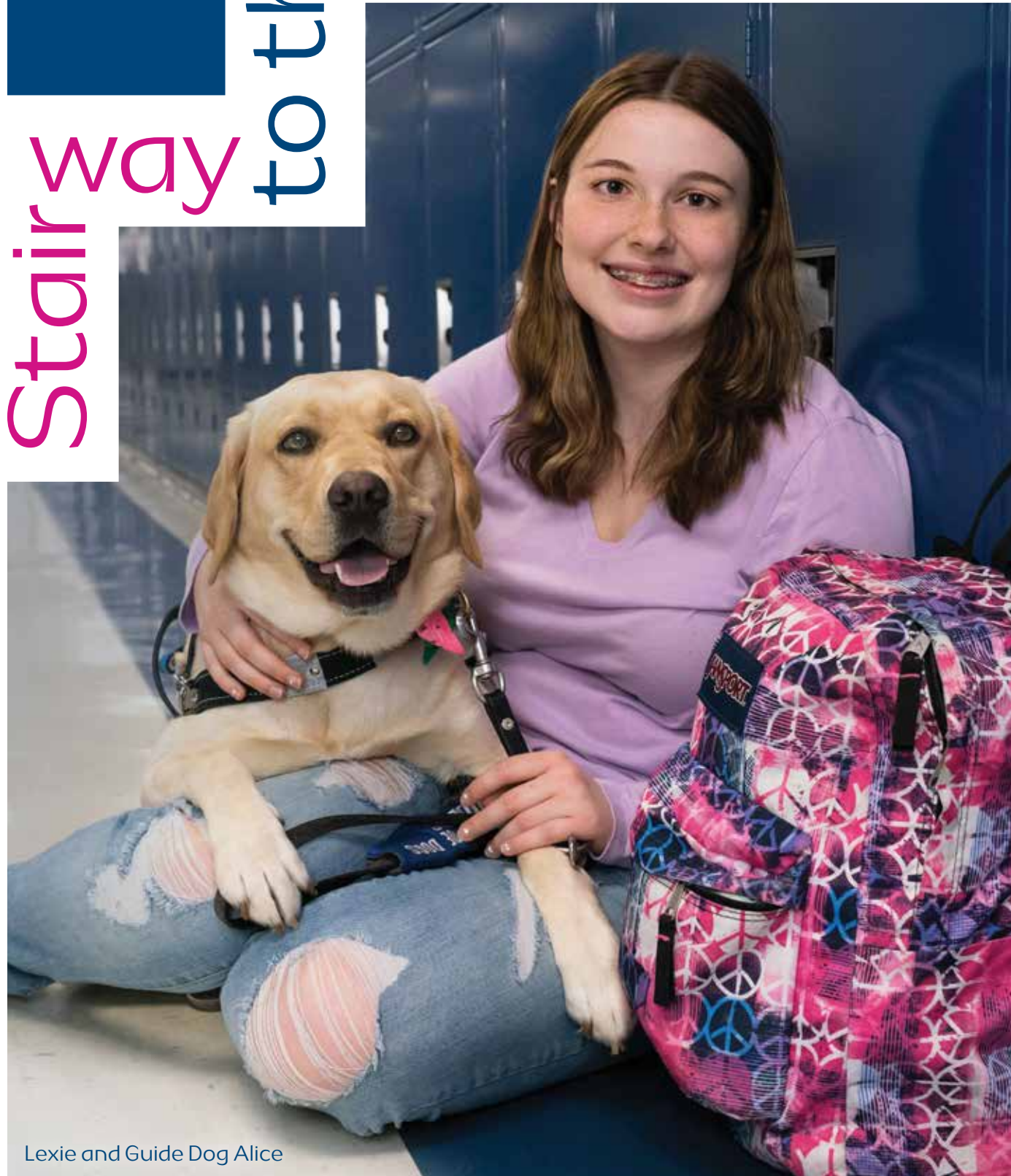


Stairway

to the

Future

How Alice transformed Lexie's high school journey



Lexie and Guide Dog Alice

On the evening of her high school homecoming

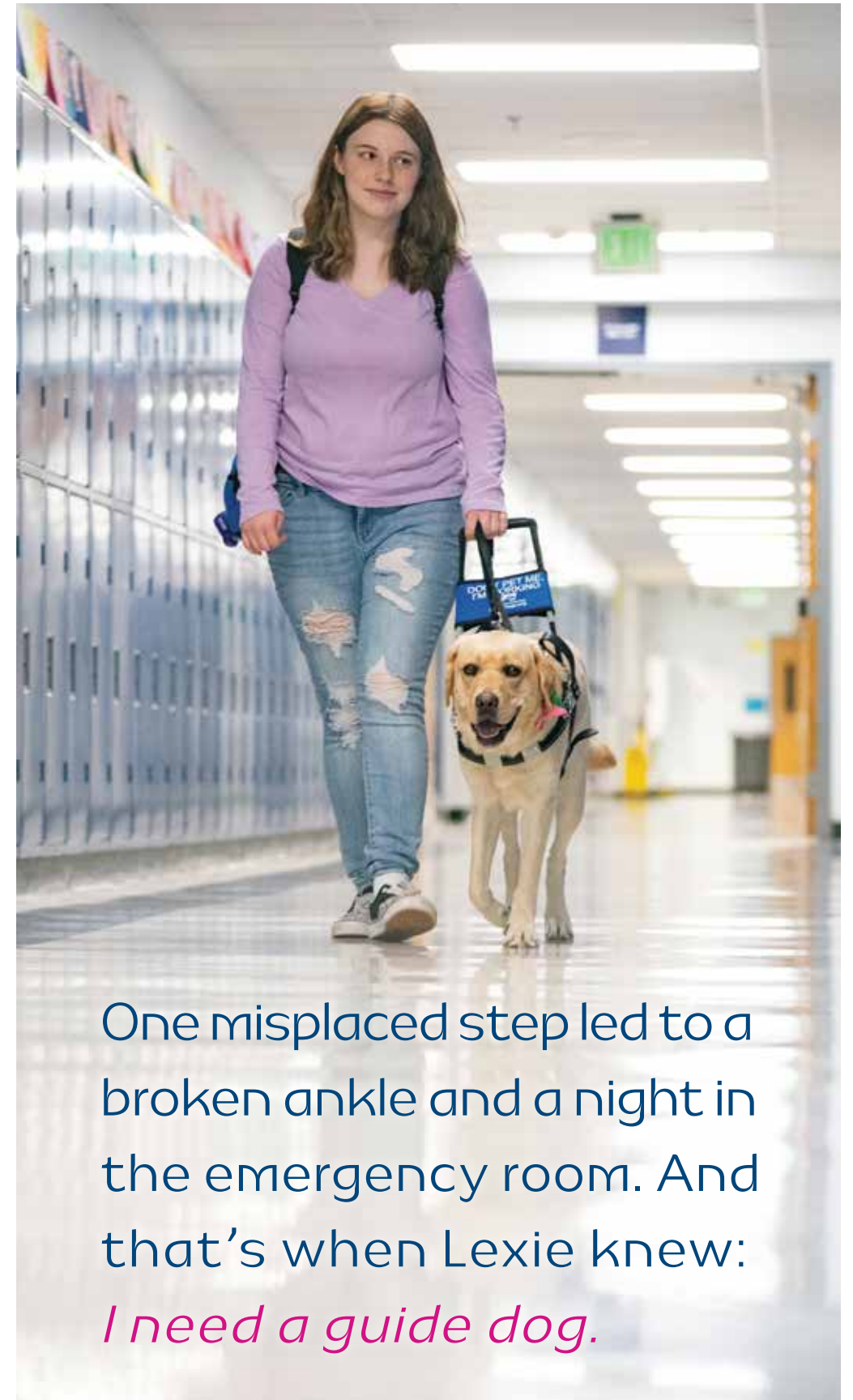
in Elkridge, Maryland, Lexie planned to dance the night away. She chose the perfect dress. Feeling beautiful, she practiced a few cautious steps in her new heels before heading downstairs for pictures.

Then the dim stairway messed up everything.

One misplaced step led to a broken ankle and a night in the emergency room.

And that's when Lexie knew: *I need a guide dog.*

She had always wanted one. But a broken bone and slightly bruised dignity made it, "I need one now, please." ▶



One misplaced step led to a broken ankle and a night in the emergency room. And that's when Lexie knew: *I need a guide dog.*



This bubbly teenager’s determined “can do” attitude didn’t mix well with her visual impairment, often leading to “ouch, that really hurt!” situations.

Lexie’s eyesight, underdeveloped since birth, can’t distinguish things with similar backgrounds. “One time, there was a street sign in my way, and I didn’t see it,” she says. “It was thin, and I walked right into it.”

A white cane helped her get around but also served as a constant visual reminder of her vision loss, drawing unwanted attention and putting up awkward social barriers.

Her urgent goal? Get a guide dog.

Other teens with similar challenges inspired her with social media stories about their awesome four-legged assistants. She knew the minimum age for a guide dog was 15, but Lexie applied at only 14. “I couldn’t wait,” she says.

Today, she posts her own stories. The selfies show a broadly beaming teen next to a bright-eyed Lab named Alice—Lexie’s devoted guide, constant companion, and social activities director.

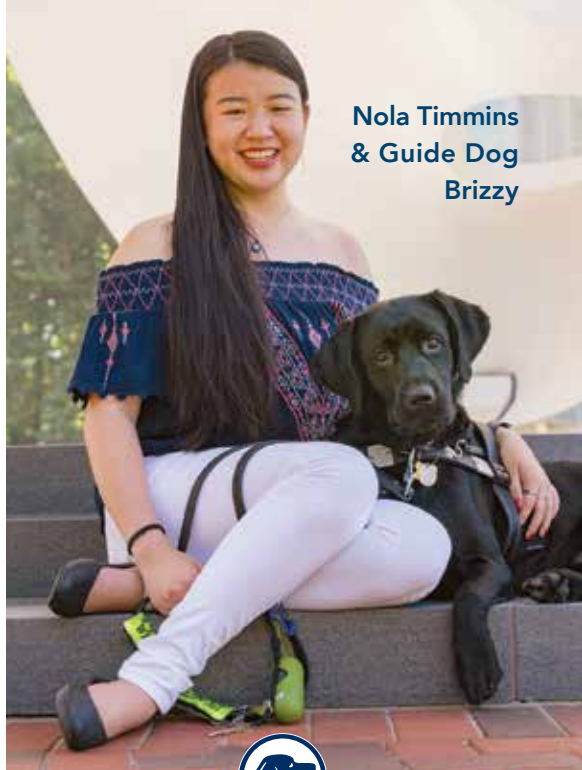
And what a perfect match!

“With her, I feel less alone,” she says. “She’s definitely a comfort and makes things a lot more exciting. She helps me look at things in a more optimistic light. She keeps me on my toes and gets me out of my house, out of my comfort zone.”

With Alice by her side, Lexie plans to tackle her senior year, then college. With her exquisite training, Alice can handle crowded hallways, classrooms, and locker rooms like a pro. Stairs? No problem. Trips and falls? That’s history.

Together, this dynamic duo faces a future without bounds. A future filled with hope and dreams, where every day becomes an adventure in wonderland. ■

Generosity can live forever.



Nola Timmins & Guide Dog Brizzy



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Join our Heritage Society by including Southeastern Guide Dogs in your will, and leave a legacy that lasts.



Learn more at GuideDogs.org/HS

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Best Friends Math

\$1 = \$2 with Best Friends Buddies!

★ Because of the generosity of our **Best Friends Buddies**, your \$1 gift becomes \$2; your \$100 gift becomes \$200, and your \$1,000 gift becomes \$2,000—because **your donation will be matched up to \$250,000!**

Our Dogs + Kids in Need = **Best Friends Forever**

Our dogs brighten the lives of their besties. These furry wonders help kids and teens replace the shadows of loneliness and anxiety with bright beams of confidence and hope. They add joy and multiply miracles! But they can't do it alone.

The Winning Equation

Best Friends Buddies + **YOU** = Double Your Donation

Our Best Friends Buddies will **double your donation, matching dollar-for-dollar, up to a total of \$250,000.**

That's unconditional love x 2.

It's a perfect match, dollar-for-dollar! ★

Donate today at [GuideDogs.org/bestfriends](https://www.GuideDogs.org/bestfriends)



Meet Our

Best Friends Buddies

These caring individuals pooled their resources to present our \$250,000 Best Friends Matching Challenge.



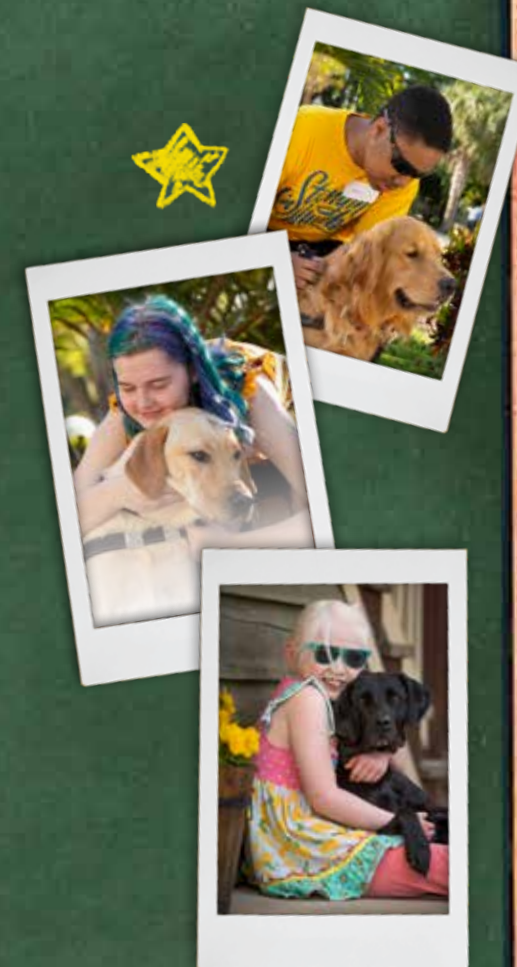
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