


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



# About Us

**SIDE**  **SIDE** is a publication of Southeastern Guide Dogs.

Thanks to the generosity of our donors and volunteers, our extraordinary dogs transform the lives of people with vision loss, veterans, and children throughout the United States—at no cost to the recipients.

## EXTRAORDINARY DOGS

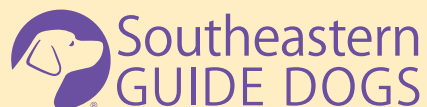
What makes our dogs so special? Top-notch pedigrees, perfected over four decades of selective breeding. And thousands of hours of training, care, and love. The heartwarming result? Highly skilled four-legged friends who shine as true examples of unwavering loyalty.

## TRANSFORMING LIVES

Our dogs form unbreakable bonds with their human partners. They turn darkness into light for people with vision loss. They restore freedom for veterans who have sacrificed for ours. And they heal the broken hearts of children struggling with loss.

## AT NO COST TO RECIPIENTS

And here's the best part. Our dogs offer an invaluable service and give their love unconditionally, never asking for anything in return—and we follow their lead. We offer our clients their loyal friends, expert instruction, and lifetime support completely free of charge.



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*Special thanks*  
to  
**Subaru** for  
sponsoring  
this issue of  
*Side by Side*.



# Hello

Dear Friend,

As our inspiring graduates embrace a new life with their dogs, I trust this issue of *Side by Side* showcases the tremendous difference these amazing four-legged wonders make to their human partners.

Renewed freedom. Restored confidence. A sense of purpose. New heights of joy, and new depths of peace.

Maybe 7-year-old Riley says it best, talking about her skilled companion dog, Banks: "He makes me feel brave."

Thank you for helping our dogs deliver bravery, smiles, and laughter to Riley and so many others. We're grateful.

With gratitude,

Titus Herman  
Chief Executive Officer





# Our Dogs

WE PROVIDE OUR DOGS  
& SERVICES AT NO COST



GUIDE DOGS offer freedom and confidence to teens, adults, and veterans with vision loss.



SERVICE DOGS offer help, healing, and hope to veterans.

- ▶ Service dogs help veterans heal from physical and invisible wounds.
- ▶ Therapy dogs assist patients and healthcare workers at military facilities to recover from pain and distress.



SKILLED COMPANION DOGS offer comfort and companionship to their human partners. They give:

- ▶ 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.





## Tony | Service Dog Promise

U.S. ARMY VETERAN   
MIAMI, FLORIDA

Seeking relief from recurring nightmares, post-traumatic stress disorder, and the everyday challenges of civilian life, U.S. Army veteran Tony turned to our service dog program. He found a best friend in Promise, a bright and alert yellow Lab. What was his life like before Promise? "I didn't feel like doing anything," Tony says. "I struggled to even leave the house. But with Promise, I got a battle buddy who's always got my back."

**Promise** was raised by Mary Mulvey.



## Alyson | Gold Star Family Dog Silver

SAINT CLAIR SHORES, MICHIGAN

When 23-year-old Army medic Paul Cuzzupe died in Afghanistan, his cousin, Alyson, fell apart. More like twins than cousins, the two grew up together and would speak constantly.

Alyson's anxiety and stress affected her husband and kids. Her aunt suggested a Gold Star family dog, and now attentive, snuggly Silver provides comfort and hope to this grieving family.

"I love Silver's company," Alyson says. "She makes me feel loved. She can't replace Paul, but she's brought light back into my life."

**Silver** was raised by Susan Scott.

"I want to  
go, go, go,  
and Soldier  
does too."



## Charli | Guide Dog Soldier

GLENCOE, ALABAMA

**Soldier** was raised by Dorrie LaBianca, Anthony Simone, and the Bland Family.



## Lily | Skilled Companion Dog Flicka

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Twins Lily and Talia entered the world adored, beautiful, and full of potential. But their parents discovered a crushing difference: Lily was born without eyes due to anophthalmia.

With no light perception, she lives in perpetual darkness.

Scared to be alone, Lily's need for a constant presence—someone to sit with, someone to cuddle her—became impossible for her parents to meet. When they learned about our skilled companion dogs, hope began to bloom.

Enter Flicka, a "calm queen" who now soothes 8-year-old Lily with unconditional affection, adding independence and structure to her day. Before, when her siblings played noisily, Lily teetered between panic and feeling left out. Now, one touch of Flicka's paw reassures Lily that she's okay.

An enthusiastic learner, Lily loves to care for Flicka and can't wait to be old enough for her own guide dog.

"Getting Lily out of the house was always a struggle," her mother says. "Now, she's getting out of the house once or twice a day to walk Flicka."

The duo's subtle communication is everything. When Flicka sits down, Lily may not see her or be close enough to touch her, but she knows.

They speak the same love language, no translation needed.

**Flicka** was raised by Cindy Laukert and Logan Neser.



## Rick Grisenthwaite Guide Dog Luna

PERRY, GEORGIA

Rick Grisenthwaite, a retired hobby farmer, would walk two miles to his farm steeling himself for a terrifying challenge: crossing six lanes of traffic. Rick confides, "As your vision drops, so does your confidence. A guide dog gives you that confidence back." Rick says of his new guide dog Luna, "She's a prayer—answered."

**Luna** was raised by Tina Lakhotia.



*"Having Chip physically next to me,  
knowing that somebody is there,  
it helps me feel safe."*

## Cyera | Service Dog Chip

U.S. NAVY VETERAN   
TEXAS

**Chip** was raised by Colleen Flaherty and Maria Abelleira.



## Kenneth Williams | Guide Dog Ollie

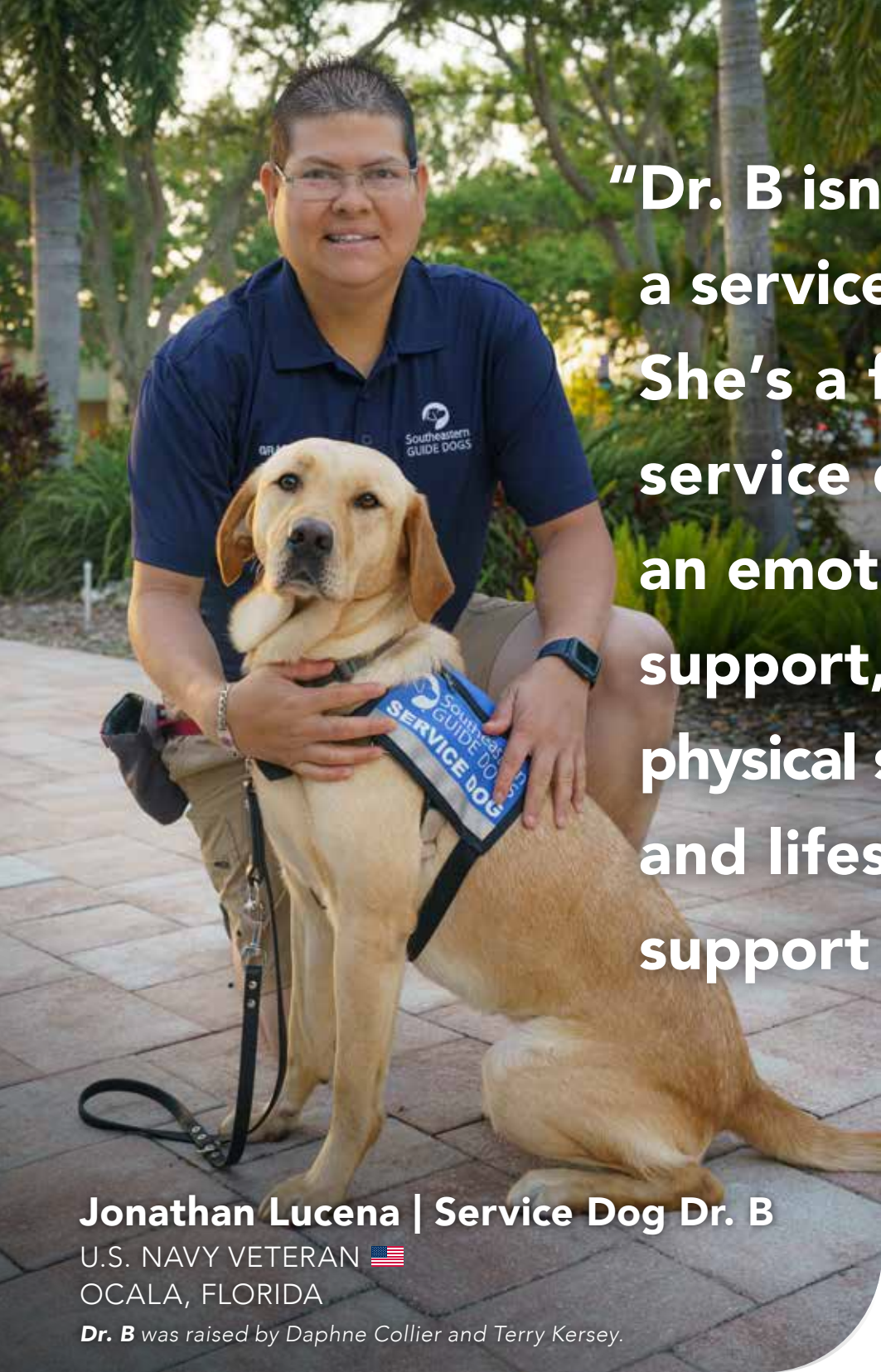
PANAMA CITY, FLORIDA

Born with severe visual limitations, Kenneth lost what was left of his sight—literally overnight—at age 23. That's when he knew he needed a guide dog. Now an energetic goldador named Ollie helps Kenneth, an avid outdoorsman, live life the way he wants. "I can fish, golf, and cook," Kenneth says proudly. And his favorite thing about Ollie? "He likes to cuddle a lot and give kisses and hugs."

**Ollie** was raised by Jo & Eddie Wiseman.








**"Dr. B isn't just a service dog. She's a full-service dog: an emotional support, physical support, and lifestyle support dog."**

## **Jonathan Lucena | Service Dog Dr. B**

U.S. NAVY VETERAN   
OCALA, FLORIDA

*Dr. B was raised by Daphne Collier and Terry Kersey.*

## **Ellen Veatch | Guide Dog Winnie**

ENTERPRISE, ALABAMA

Surgeries and medications haven't stabilized Ellen's glaucoma. Trips, falls, and light blindness kept her isolated indoors after her first guide dog retired. Now her new guide, Winnie, restores her sense of well-being. "Winnie is a marvelous dog," Ellen says. "She makes me feel safe, gives me more confidence, lets other people know I have a vision problem, and gets me out of my house so I can socialize. Winnie looks out for me, and I look out for her. We're a team."

*Winnie was raised by Carole and the late Ronald Bloom.*

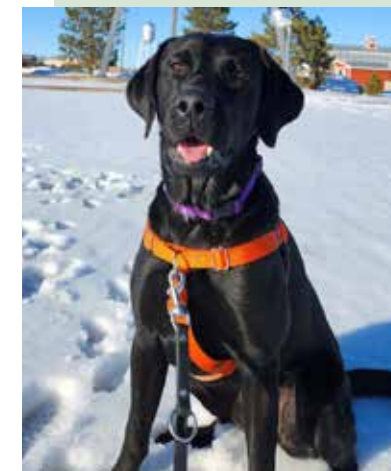


*"Unconditional love is very rare in this day and age. For people with anxieties, the biggest takeaway is that you start focusing less on yourself... you start giving the love back."*

## **John | Skilled Companion Dog Gizmo**

U.S. NAVY VETERAN   
WASHINGTON STATE

*Gizmo was raised by Janet Mills.*



## **Kim Hamby | Guide Dog Menda**

ADAIRSVILLE, GEORGIA

When Kim's vision loss forced her to give up driving and working, she struggled with loneliness and isolation, and she felt unworthy of a guide dog. But when her husband also started going blind, Kim knew they desperately needed help.

Now, Kim navigates freely with Menda, who gives her unconditional love and independence. "Menda is more than I ever expected, more than I ever could've asked for," Kim says.

*Menda was raised by Mary & Russell Hillpot.*







## Silver Hamilton | Guide Dog Pixie

FRANKLIN, OHIO

Silver views life through binoculars—at least that’s how she describes it. As retinitis pigmentosa slowly takes what’s left of her vision, this self-described proactive realist is preparing for a life without sight. At age 20, and at the recommendation of her orientation and mobility instructor, Silver decided to get a Southeastern Guide Dog. And she did—a mellow cuddle bug named Pixie.

Before Pixie, Silver’s anxiety held her back. Going out for a simple walk was unthinkable. “I definitely couldn’t walk freely outside at night or if the weather wasn’t perfect,” she says. “I felt like I was stumbling through life literally and metaphorically.” But everything changed with Pixie by her side. “Now, I’m so comfortable doing things. She brings more hope into my life, a hope I gave up looking for.”

A once slow and overly cautious life is now one of adventure and “let’s go!” Just one example? Hiking. “With Pixie, I was able to do a whole trail at a normal pace, without holding on to someone,” Silver beams. “I didn’t even trip once. She’s my confidence on four legs.”

**Pixie** was raised by Sarah & Kailey Erschabek, Dennis Uhler, and Anina & Roy Green.





## Tracy Krauss Facility Therapy Dog Charles Patrick

U.S. NAVAL MEDICAL CENTER  
AT SEWELL'S POINT   
NORFOLK, VIRGINIA

Nurse and public health expert Tracy Krauss knows that special dogs save lives. She commands a service population of 30,000 at the largest naval station in the U.S. She recently welcomed sweet Charles Patrick, or Charlie, to the base. "He opens doors to communication that are otherwise blocked," Tracy says. She reports that officers on the USS *Iwo Jima* credit canine visits with a decline in suicide rates. "He can respond, adapt, and make people feel safe."

**Charles Patrick** was raised by Sarah Byrd.



## Riley | Banks Skilled Companion Dog ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Sweet 7-year-old Riley is legally blind, but her vision loss is only one symptom of the nightmare diagnosis of Batten disease. This rare, inherited brain and nervous system disorder progresses rapidly and has no cure.

Help comes in the shape of Banks, a skilled companion dog with a slow, calm, and soothing demeanor. Banks provides unconditional love and emotional support, quelling Riley's sleep disturbances, anxiety, and fears. "He just makes me feel brave," says Riley, the bravest of little souls.

**Banks** was raised by Taunnie Novak.



## Evan Orr | Guide Dog Jon Jon TULSA, OKLAHOMA

Evan once had full sight, but at age 28, his vision began to fade. Diabetic retinopathy affected both eyes, leaving him legally blind—and emotionally devastated. But that wasn't going to stop him. Noticing how hard Evan worked to relearn daily life tasks, an instructor encouraged him to get a guide dog. And so he did. Evan found a new spark in life with a lively goldador named Jon Jon.

Always on and up for anything, Jon Jon is a tonic for Evan. The confidence Evan lost with his sight returned in bulk, and with it, an abundance of joy. "Jon Jon gives me more freedom in my day-to-day life," Evan says. "I'm no longer trapped in the house, and I can enjoy going out."

His family has noticed the difference in Evan, too. "My wife mentioned that I'm more interested and willing to go out and do things," he says. "Jon Jon is the key that's unlocked a door to a whole new life." With his newly boosted confidence comes a newfound freedom, not only for himself but for his entire family. And it's all possible because of a handsome, determined goldador named Jon Jon.

**Jon Jon** was raised by Jim & Donna Travis.



## John Tempone | Service Dog Deedle

U.S. MARINE VETERAN 🇺🇸  
TAMPA, FLORIDA

Waves of anguish claw at John's mental health 24/7.

He fixates on a twist of fate that transferred him out of his battalion before it was attacked in Beirut, Lebanon, when a suicide bomber killed 241 of his Multinational Force comrades on October 23, 1983. That tragedy, and a long career serving in war zones, feed the post-traumatic stress that robs this Marine of peace.

For the first time in 40 years, however, John will attend a commemorative event honoring his buddies.

How? Deedle, "a bundle of joy, energy, and tranquility," now calms his soul.

"I didn't think I could get this zen this quickly with a dog," John admits. "It'll be emotional, but Deedle will be there with me. I can do the things that I need to do without crawling out of my skin."

John no longer looks over his shoulder nervously while ushering in church. He can now linger at the model train club with his friends without rushing home. Grocery shopping can now occur any time of the day, even when the store isn't empty.

Just having sweet Deedle's head in his lap "throttles back" the red-hot frustration and sense of loss that sometimes well up. "None of this would have happened to me before Deedle," John says, proud to take life in stride.

**Deedle** was raised by Lew Eads and Patricia Burke.







**Zoe Garrison**  
**Guide Dog Dancer**  
JACKSONVILLE, ILLINOIS

Born with “just enough vision to get in trouble,” Zoe learned early what guide dogs can do. But she’s never met one like Dancer. The effect this spirited pup has on Zoe’s life is not only life-, but soon, city-changing. “I’m getting ready to pick up and move to a bigger city. I can’t wait because I know that when we get there, Dancer will help me whenever my confidence fails,” Zoe says. “She’s my perfect partner.”

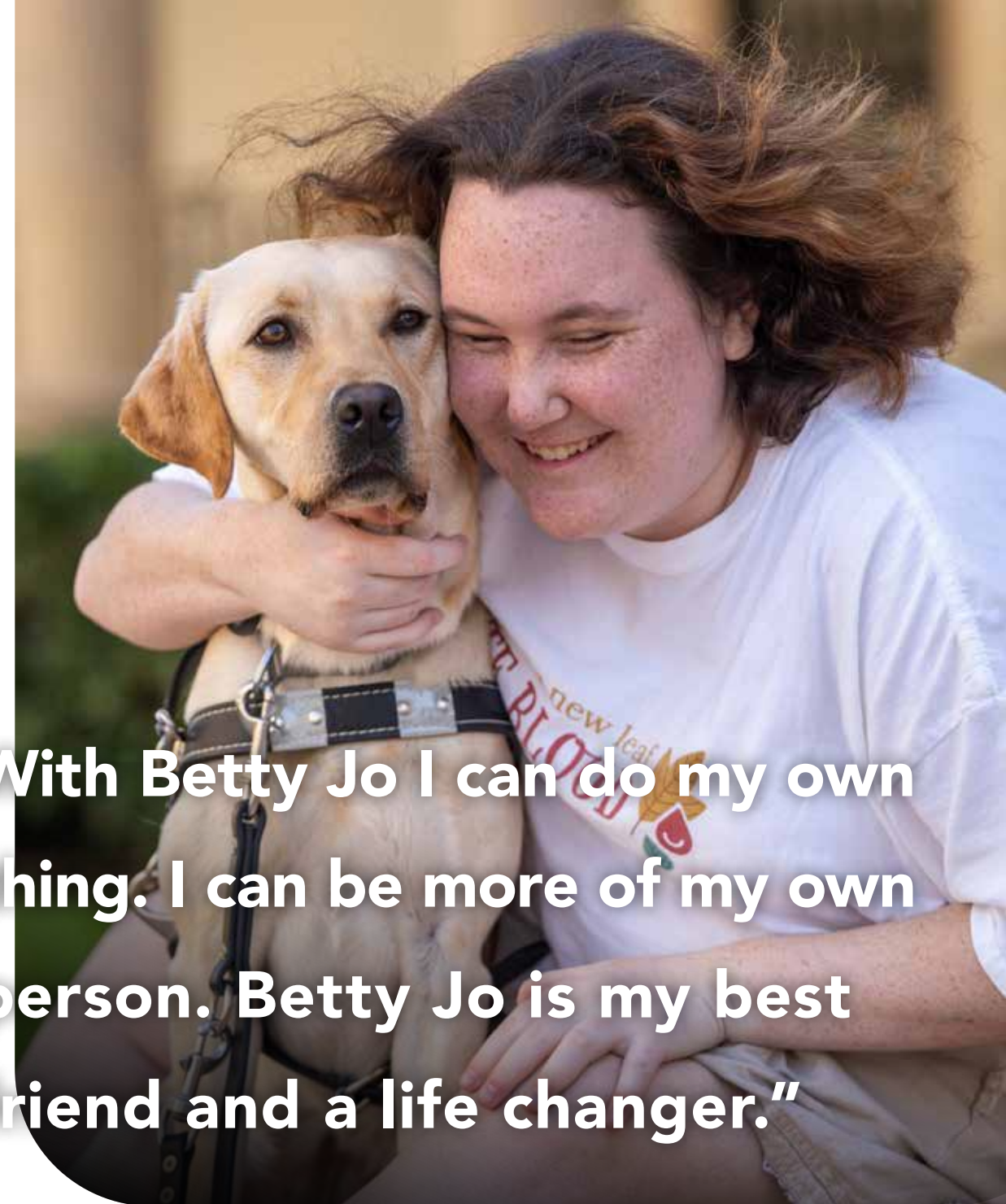
***Dancer** was raised by Jane Wilson.*



**Lexie | Guide Dog Alice**  
ELKRIDGE, MARYLAND

Lexie, a typical high school girl, was determined to dance the night away at Homecoming. A stairway altered her plans completely, leading to a date with the emergency room. Lexie’s eyesight, underdeveloped since birth, can’t distinguish things that lack contrast. She always wanted a guide dog. Now she *needed* one. Then, Lexi met Alice, the perfect match for this outgoing teenager. What’s next? Senior year, college, and an unlimited future—all thanks to a wonderful girl named Alice.

***Alice** was raised by Alexandra & David Cagle.*

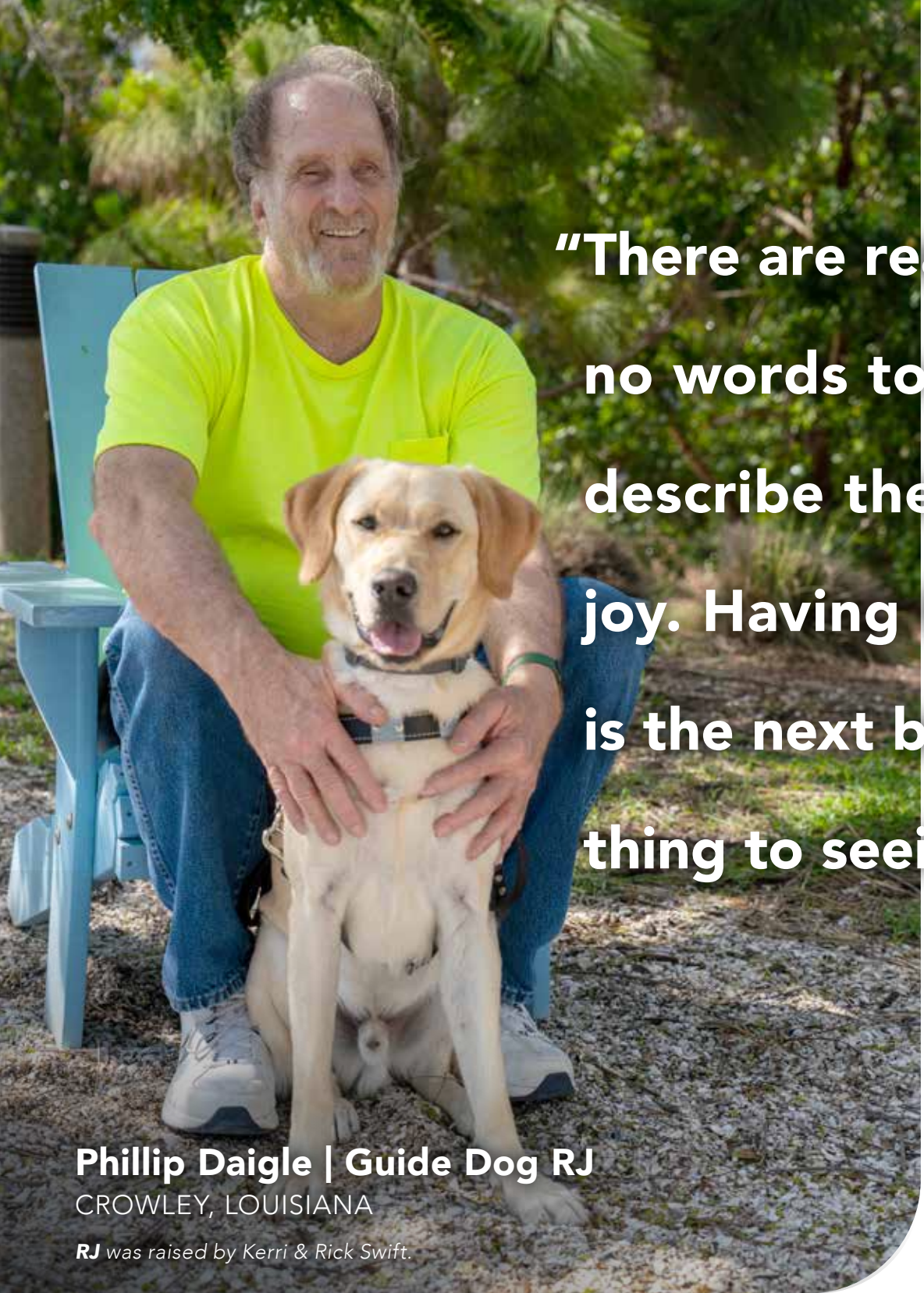


**“With Betty Jo I can do my own thing. I can be more of my own person. Betty Jo is my best friend and a life changer.”**

**Rachel Hyche | Guide Dog Betty Jo**  
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

***Betty Jo** was raised by Morgan McCree.*





"There are really  
no words to  
describe the  
joy. Having RJ  
is the next best  
thing to seeing."

**Phillip Daigle | Guide Dog RJ**  
CROWLEY, LOUISIANA

*RJ was raised by Kerri & Rick Swift.*

## **Christina Holtzclaw Guide Dog Gershwin**

ROME, GEORGIA

After Christina's third guide dog retired, she yearned for a successor. Enter Gershwin, a savior in fur, matching Christina's pace seamlessly, transforming airports into playgrounds, and finding joy in escalators. Be it tranquil towns or bustling cities, Gershwin stays steadfast. Now, their burgeoning bond fuels Christina's independence, replacing her cane-born uncertainty with newfound freedom.

**Gershwin** was raised by Elizabeth Zuniga and Karen Muller.



## **Sarah | Service Dog Barney**

U.S. ARMY NATIONAL GUARD VETERAN  
COLORADO 🇺🇸

While night training wearing a heavy Army rucksack nine years ago, Sarah fell, dislocating seven vertebrae. She still fights vertigo, loss of mobility and dexterity, anxiety, migraines, and depression. Today, however, Barney changes everything. "Barney provides my sunshine on a gloomy day and is one of the best things to come into my life," Sarah says. "He does things for me that I never thought I would need a dog to help with. He exceeds my expectations!"

**Barney** was raised by Barbara Poorman, Robert O'Neil, and Michele & Chris Koelsch.





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# Made for every “Are we there yet?”



## **The thoughtfully redesigned 2023 Subaru Ascent Onyx Edition Limited**

has three full rows of seating and room for up to eight passengers. For flexible exploration, the Ascent offers a choice of second-row captain's chairs or bench seating, plus USB-A and USB-C ports throughout.



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