

Celebrating our
new graduates

» Plus words of hope
from alumni

About Us

SIDE by 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

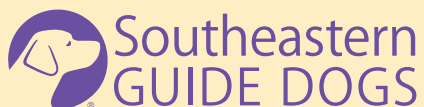
What makes our dogs so special? Top-notch pedigrees, perfected over four decades of selective breeding. And thousands of hours of training, care, and love. The heartwarming result? Highly skilled four-legged friends who shine as true examples of unwavering loyalty.

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 Fromm
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this issue of
Side by Side.



Hello

Dear Friend,

Four-legged companions.
Two-legged guardians.
Together. Side by side. Each
guiding the other. Connecting.
Loving. Inspiring.

The heart of their beautiful
stories? You.

Your compassion, your kindness, your generosity
weave these tales of hope and resilience.

Thank you for crafting these profound journeys.
I'm grateful.

With gratitude,

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

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.



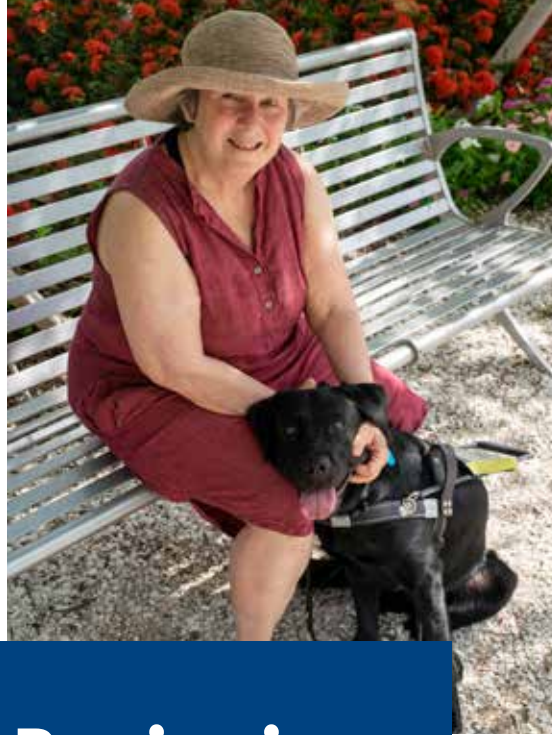
SERVICE DOGS offer help, healing, and hope to veterans.

- ▶ *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.*



Celebrate New Beginnings

OUR NEWEST GRADUATES



How New Companions Bring New Hope

A moment that changes everything—that’s what our newest graduates experience when they first embrace their extraordinary dogs. And we know that this is only the beginning. Because every day, they’ll find peace in their companion’s presence, steadfast love in their eyes, and newfound freedom in their service.

Robert Harding | Guide Dog Java

RELIANCE, TENNESSEE

A cancerous brain tumor ruthlessly impaired Robert’s vision at the tender age of nine. Through the years, he attempted to navigate with a cane, still feeling clumsy with each curb or staircase. The cane served as a constant barrier, separating Robert from society. And as a busy home-schooling dad of three children, he needed the freedom to move smoothly—to feel safe.

When Robert paired with Java, he met eyes with one who understands. “He has these beautiful gold eyes that just really look into your soul,” Robert says. An unspoken purpose between Robert and his newfound freedom. Now, Robert continues his passion of hiking along the beautiful Tennessee trails, Java at his side. “It’s like full citizenship again back into society,” he says. “Java makes everything better.”

From days of walking slowly and looking at his feet to avoid falling, Robert now explores a wide-open horizon of possibilities—together, with Java.

Java was raised by Shelly Honsberger.





“Ever since I was young, I knew I wanted a guide dog. As I got older, I knew I needed a guide dog.”

Bailey Thomas | Guide Dog Sirius
GLEN SAINT MARY, FLORIDA
Sirius was raised by Marten Weldon.

Adina | Service Dog Duke

U.S. NAVY VETERAN 
FLORIDA

Hyper-vigilant and often fearful, Navy veteran Adina’s world shrank to four walls. But now, service dog Duke repairs the damage. “He’s an attentive sweetheart who’s always right there,” Adina says. “I feel secure now. Not alone.” Duke keeps Adina in the present—while gently leading her into a bright future.

Duke was raised by Joanne Asencio.



*“What has Libby done for me?
Everything.”*

Leo DeWane | Guide Dog Libby

WAUKESHA, WISCONSIN

Libby was raised by Emily Skywark and Matthew Connor.

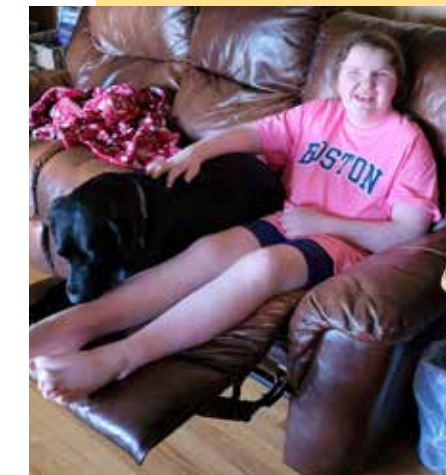


**Charlotte | Sterling
Skilled Companion Dog**

GOSHEN, NEW YORK

After many scary surgeries, Charlotte, now 12, enjoys new confidence with her skilled companion dog, Sterling. “Charlotte wakes up early to feed and care for Sterling before school,” Charlotte’s mom, Jenn, says. “All the cues, the love, the companionship—it’s just amazing.”

Sterling was raised by Leslie Cechan—her 25th puppy raised!





Jessica Rhein | Service Dog Spencer

U.S. NAVY VETERAN 🇺🇸
GREEN COVE SPRINGS, FLORIDA

Years devoted to protecting others through treacherous waters, guarding civilian ships in heavily pirated areas. The pressure weighed on her body and mind.

After seven years with the Naval Military Police, Jessica Rhein re entered a world where protecting others was all she knew. Lost. The physical and emotional pain, unbearable.

"I didn't know how to communicate effectively, so I just kept it all in," Jessica says. "I had major PTSD, so I kept myself from others."

But when intelligent Spencer came along, he simply wouldn't allow his person to hold back any longer. When Jessica traps her emotions inside, Spencer's loving gaze gently tells her, "No, we're feeling this. Together."

Spencer welcomes Jessica into a new life where his perfectly timed hugs help her decompress from stressful situations and his playful energy and purposeful nose nudges remind her to prioritize herself. And he won't stop nudging until she does.

"There's a complete awareness that I didn't know I was lacking and neglecting about myself," she admits.

Spencer brings relief, joy, and rescue to Jessica in ways she never even knew she needed. Until she met him.

Spencer was raised by Emi Wyble & Ginny Satterfield.



Barbara Gaw Guide Dog Barbara

TAMPA, FLORIDA

Energetic and loving Barbara, “Babs” for short, is Barbara’s second guide dog and will help grow her business: providing job and benefit counseling to people on Social Security disability. She can walk confidently again without struggling and no longer fears falling over obstacles. The less she’s able to see, the more Barbara appreciates her furry cuddle bug. “The dog is your friend, and the dog is going to stay with you,” this grateful handler says. “You’re never by yourself.”

Barbara was raised by Sue & Steve Queen.



AJ and Aa'Reck | Leon Skilled Companion Dog

SUN CITY CENTER, FLORIDA

Two brothers, eager to gain a taste of independence, yet both faced with a rare genetic eye condition. Leon encourages greater responsibility and independence, especially for AJ, who is legally blind. The boys take turns walking, feeding, and practicing cues. But Leon has AJ’s heart. He is firmly implanted in the family, a bright light in the darkness.

Leon was raised by Julian Johnson.

“For Tango, I like the term ‘battle buddy’ because that’s exactly what she is for me. She’s got my six.”



Chad Duplain | Service Dog Tango

U.S. MARINE CORPS VETERAN 
NORTH CANTON, OHIO

Tango was raised by Kelly & Dale Youngs and Christie Bane.



Hannah Creel | Hope Skilled Companion Dog

HOOVER, ALABAMA

Life unfolds possibilities like a red carpet. Every year brings new experiences. New decisions to make.

For Hannah, life—and some days, even getting out of bed—feels less like a red carpet on which to strut and more like a grueling mountain hike. Her rare, degenerative disease and numerous medications steal her energy. Drain her optimism. Her “normal” fades, and maybe one day, her vision will, too.

Hannah’s life: a perpetual twilight. But then, dawn broke.

Now, a ray of sunshine—aptly named Hope—brightens Hannah’s days. “Quirky,”

Hannah calls this pup. Hilarious. Charismatic. Loyal. And brimming with pure, boundless energy.

“She makes me want to get out of bed,” Hannah says. “To face the difficulties others never even see.”

Four weeks together, and already Hannah has a new description for Hope: Game-changer.

“At first, I was scared I wouldn’t bond with her,” Hannah admits. “But I can’t even describe our connection.” A pause. “I didn’t know how much I needed her.”

Hope finds her purpose. And Hannah faces life with a newfound hope.

Hope was raised by Nicole Del Savio.

Manny | Ada Skilled Companion Dog

HOPKINTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

“Ada helps give Manny a typical childhood, one where blindness does not define him,” says Manny’s adoptive mother, Kym. “It means the world to us that he can love and care for a dog, and be loved in return, just like any other 6-year-old.”

Ada was raised by Carole Adamczyk.



“Zazu is tuned into everything going on in me.”

John | Service Dog Zazu

U.S. ARMY VETERAN 
ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Zazu was raised by Michele Nielsen.

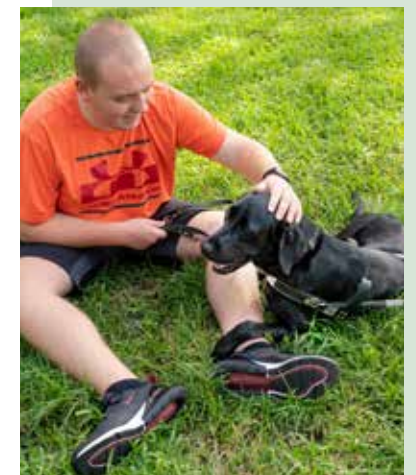


Richard Beardsley Guide Dog Furlough

OCALA, FLORIDA

While freedom is one of the gifts that came with Furlough, Richard’s favorite thing about her is the companionship she brings. “I was good with my cane and never scared to walk in the dark, but having the love and friendship of a guide dog is something I’ve always wanted.”

Furlough was raised by Eleanor “Sissy” Scharf.





“On the way home from Florida, AJ and I were moving through the airport, weaving in and out of the crowd, and I could hear all sorts of comments and gasps of amazement at how quickly we were moving. That’s a testament to how well-matched AJ and I are. He likes to move fast, and so do I.”

Mike Moaba | Guide Dog AJ
WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

AJ was raised by Jonathan Sperling.



Sydney Delcontivo | Guide Dog Andi

COCONUT CREEK, FLORIDA

Having spent her whole life without depth perception or peripheral vision, 18-year-old Sydney now has the guide dog of her dreams. "I knew Andi was top-tier, first-round-draft-pick material, but she's even better!" she says. "She's everything I'd hoped she'd be—everything my younger self desired. It's the best thing ever."

Andi was raised by Brian & Susan Cullum.



"I can do everything that I could do with a cane, but with Jake, that feeling goes off the charts. A 12 out of 10!"

Mary Tyson | Guide Dog Jake

HOLLY HILL, FLORIDA

Jake was raised by Bobbea Fina and Colleen Flaherty & Maria Abelleira.



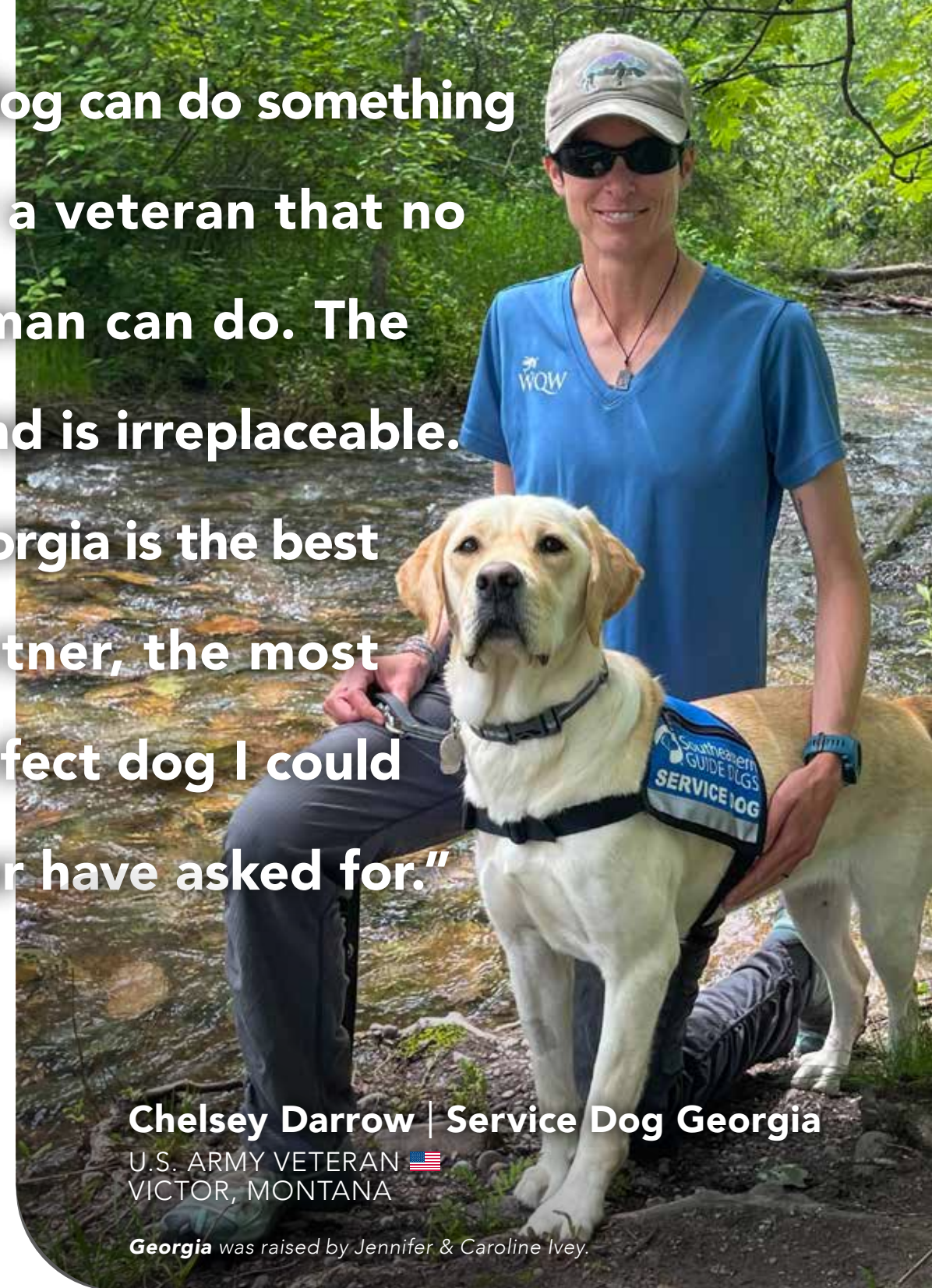
Nico Owen | Guide Dog Gabe

SARASOTA, FLORIDA

When Nico's retinitis pigmentosa went from daily annoyance to painful danger, he knew something needed to change. Now he's found a comforting confidante in Gabe, a handsome black Lab. "He rests his head on my knee when I'm feeling down," Nico says. "He's a knight by my side."

Gabe was raised by John & Lyndsay Goldsmith.

"A dog can do something for a veteran that no human can do. The bond is irreplaceable. Georgia is the best partner, the most perfect dog I could ever have asked for."



Chelsey Darrow | Service Dog Georgia

U.S. ARMY VETERAN 
VICTOR, MONTANA

Georgia was raised by Jennifer & Caroline Ivey.



A faithful friend and a companion to prepare Conor for the possibility of one day having a guide dog—Beacon’s light shines bright.

Conor | Skilled Companion Dog Beacon

HOLMDEL, NEW JERSEY

Beacon was raised by Nancy Simons.

Duke Edwards | Guide Dog Tucker

U.S. ARMY VETERAN 
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

Despite a condition called NAION destroying his sight, Army veteran Duke stays active with energetic Tucker, a “full-blown teenager” whose sound judgment already saved Duke from being hit by a car. “He showed me that I need to have patience and slow down!” Duke says. “I’ve regained my independence.”

Tucker was raised by Diane and Roger Lincoln.



“I trust Peter to do his job, so I can continue a lifestyle of independence.”

Sara Gamble | Guide Dog Peter

WHEELING, WEST VIRGINIA

Peter was raised by Jackie Wolfinger-Zellinger.



Janet Raffel | Guide Dog Jamy

PORTLAND, MAINE

In one day, Janet went from fully sighted to legally blind. With the change striking while she was in her thirties, she struggled to accept the transition from a life of driving her kids to school to recovering from falls on business trips. Guide dog Jamy makes all the difference. “Having Jamy makes me feel so much more confident,” Janet says.

Jamy was raised by Jeff Schafer.





Jackie Schiemann | Guide Dog Tyrus

MAYFIELD VILLAGE, OHIO

Tyrus is Jackie's rock, finding the curbs and steps that are her nemesis. Putting his handler's safety first. "I have faith in him; more than I have for most people," Jackie says. "I'm putting my life in his paws, and we are working together." With her head held high, Jackie sees endless possibilities.

"This feels like independence."

Tyrus was raised by Kristi Schleicher



"Billy just lights people up and makes them happy."

Kelly | Facility Therapy Dog Billy

JAMES A. HALEY VETERANS' HOSPITAL 
TAMPA, FLORIDA

Billy was raised by Mary and Mitch McCune.



Neal Eastep | Guide Dog Dale

DECATUR, ALABAMA

Neal's first guide dog, Shadow, will always hold a special place in his heart. And when he met calm, confident Dale, magic entered his world once again. All business when working, Dale enhances Neal's independence and mobility. Life is once again richer. "It's like having Shadow back home again," Neal says.

Dale was raised by Rob Montgomery and Jennifer Taylor & the late Carla Anderson.



Generosity
can live
forever.



HERITAGE
SOCIETY

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](https://www.Guidedogs.org/HS).

Can one dog change a life?

Just ask our alumni. New adventures, days of hope, nights of peace—the change these exceptional dogs make doesn't end when they meet their soulmates. It grows. With every act of love, moment of trust, and step of courage, these special bonds reach greater depths and soar to new heights.



FINDING FREEDOM

Cheryl Sytsma & Guide Dog Hero

ENGLEWOOD, FLORIDA | MATCHED 2022

"Hero completes my life and helps me gain independence and **freedom**. I've learned to be more outgoing with people and no longer feel the need to isolate. She picks me up when I'm sad and is always by my side to give kisses. Hero is the best companion in my life—my buddy, my pal."

Where are They Now?

ALUMNI UPDATE



Shawna Taylor-Penella & Service Dog Annie

TAMPA, FLORIDA | MATCHED 2019 🇺🇸

Post-traumatic stress can make sadness the norm. But for Navy veteran Shawna, service dog Annie brings a new experience: happy tears.

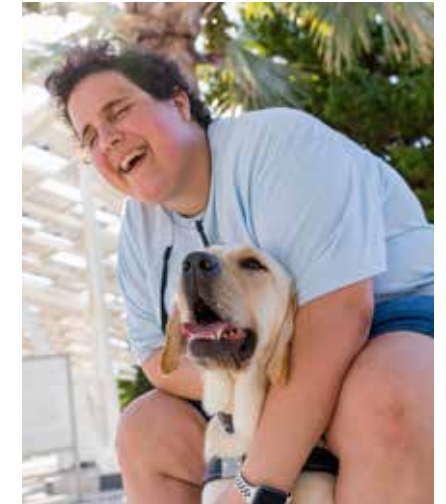
"When I broke down in public and my wife asked what was wrong, I told her: nothing. Nothing is wrong. I finally feel normal," Shawna says.

With Annie steady by her side, Shawna lives a new life of **freedom**.

Lacey Coward & Guide Dog Sparkle

MARION, NORTH CAROLINA | MATCHED 2021

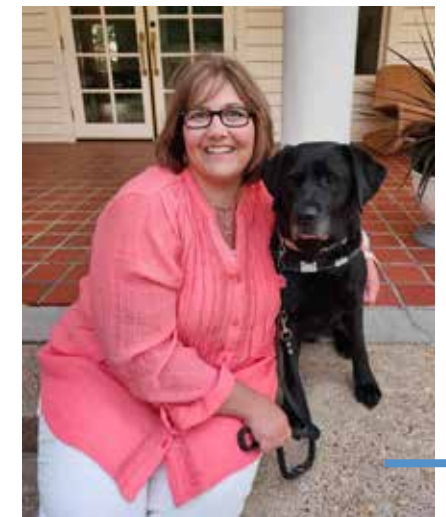
"Sparkle means **freedom** and independence to me. I can venture out on my own and do things I was afraid to do before. She makes me feel empowered. Sparkle is an absolute gift to me, and I wouldn't trade her for the world!"



Christy Wood & Guide Dog Lola

SOUTHAVEN, MISSOURI | MATCHED 2018

"Lola has given me the **freedom** and confidence back that I had lost. She brings such joy and love and is always eager to go anywhere."





Terry Wetzel & Service Dog Wendy

NAPLES, FLORIDA | MATCHED 2016 🇺🇸

“Wendy has taught me to laugh, trust, and **love** again. She’s a blessing and everyone loves her. She’s so smart and I can’t imagine life without her!”

A DEEPER LOVE



Kim Hamby & Guide Dog Menda

ADAIRSVILLE, GEORGIA | MATCHED 2023

“Menda means the world to me. I can be myself again. She is a gift from God and more perfect than any eyesight I could have kept. Thank you for finding my mini-me who loves me as much as I **love** her!”



Barry Collier & Gold Star Family Dog Summit

SARASOTA, FLORIDA | MATCHED 2022

Barry Collier knows loss—and the feel of an empty house. But now, Barry arrives home to a flurry of excitement. “Even if I’m gone fifteen minutes, Summit acts like it’s been a month,” Barry says. “She reminds me of how everyone needs someone to **love**, and to be loved.”



Charlie & Skilled Companion Dog Tina

BRADENTON, FLORIDA

MATCHED 2022

“Tina is so in tune with Charlie. They are such a beautiful team. We are absolutely in **love** with Tina. We call her our angel.”

MORE REASONS TO SMILE



Rhonda Warren & Guide Dog McKee

NEW PORT RICHEY, FLORIDA | MATCHED 2022

Rhonda once thought she'd never smile again. For years, she recalls sitting in her home. Lonely. Secretly hoping someone would stop by simply to say hello.

Now, with McKee by her side, her cheeks hurt from her constant **smile**. When every morning starts with this joyful tail-wagging friend, she can't help but feel hopeful. "McKee gives me the freedom and independence to do things I wouldn't ever do by myself being blind," Rhonda says.

And days spent in solitude? Those are a thing of the past. "I've met more neighbors in 10 months with McKee than in the past 25 years," she says.

Not only has McKee lifted Rhonda from darkness, but together, this perfect match does the same for others. On their daily walks, Rhonda and McKee visit their 94-year-old neighbor who waits every day on his front porch to walk around the block with them. "You never know the impact of kindness," Rhonda says.

McKee replaces fear with freedom, and Rhonda no longer waits at home for life to happen. With McKee, she goes out and lives it.

Marina & Skilled Companion Dog Sabrena

GLENMOORE, PENNSYLVANIA
MATCHED 2022

"Sabrena is the light to our world and more than we could have hoped for. She gets my daughter to **smile** on days when she doesn't want to and helps her open up to people and situations more. Sabrena is a ray of sunshine."



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