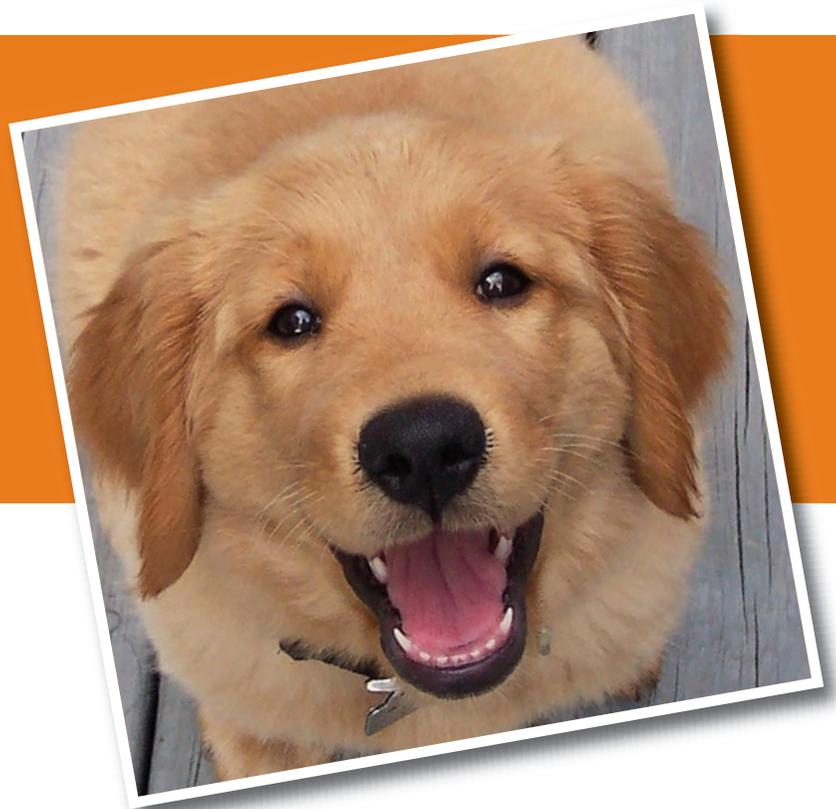




The Journey of a Guiding Eyes Dog

The transformation of a
“puppy with a purpose” to
a Guiding Eyes Dog



Guiding Eyes for the Blind

is a world-renowned nonprofit 501(c)(3) guide dog school located in New York dedicated to serving the blind and visually impaired at no cost to them. Our superb dogs are known for their exceptional temperaments and success at helping the blind to gain independence and to expand their horizons of opportunity.



Few people understand how our adorable puppies become Guiding Eyes dogs. The “magic” begins at Guiding Eyes’ Canine Development Center, also known as the CDC.

THE GUIDING EYES BREEDING COLONY

In 1993, Guiding Eyes became the first guide dog school in North America to establish a state-of-the-art reproduction program with cryogenics and transcervical insemination. We share our expertise generously with and at no charge to breeders from guide dog schools around the world. We also ship frozen semen from Guiding Eyes studs to other schools that wish to improve their breeding colonies. Thus, Guiding Eyes has established itself as the international leader in guide dog breeding.

BROODS AND STUDS

Only the most exceptional Guiding Eyes dogs become members of our breeding colony. Our veterinarians and Canine Development Center professionals collect massive amounts of genetic and temperament data on all Guiding Eyes dogs, and use this information to determine optimum breeding matches. Guiding Eyes entrusts the health, safety, and well-being of these dogs to foster volunteers, who agree to take a dog into their home – usually for the dog’s lifetime – and return the dog when needed to Guiding Eyes for breeding.

Our professional breeding staff look for a set of temperament and genetic characteristics that are most predictive of a dog’s success as a Guiding Eyes dog. These traits include being medium-sized, healthy, calm, easy to handle, confident and not distracted by other dogs.

WHELPING

Whelping, the process of giving birth, is one of the most exciting events at the CDC. Whelping Kennel staff work closely with the brood dog to help ensure a healthy pregnancy and delivery, assist the brood during her whelp and assure that her needs are met medically and emotionally. They care for the brood and her pups until the mother is returned home to her foster family, and the pups are ready to leave the Whelping Kennel.



PUPPIES' EARLY TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

A puppy's first step in preparing for guide dog work is to develop a bond of trust with a person. Guiding Eyes' "Relationship-Centered Training" begins to build these bonds nearly as soon as our puppies are born. For example, puppies are introduced to their names as early as three days old. Volunteer socializers massage the puppies in their kennels while "cooing" their names to them. This results in the puppies being more responsive to instruction when it is introduced. It also helps to accelerate building the important bond between puppy and human.

As we start socializing puppies to the human voice and touch, we also begin to evaluate our puppies' temperaments. Some puppies are "natural" guide dog material, while others need specialized training techniques that will enable them to become guide dogs.

Puppies, like humans, are more accepting of a variety of stimuli if they are exposed at an early age. From birth to 16 weeks, the pups undergo a period of rapid brain development.

PUPPY RAISING

Guiding Eyes' volunteer corps of 500 puppy raisers is comprised of a broad spectrum of caring individuals from various walks of life. They include couples, families with children, young adults, and senior citizens. Raisers live in urban, suburban, and rural areas – and in apartments, townhomes, and single family homes.



We look for patterns of behavior that indicate how well the puppy adapts to change – such as quickness of learning, energy level, reactions to noises, and interest in novel objects. Another key indicator is how willing the puppy is to pay attention to people, even when tempted by a scent or another dog.

With careful observation and at least two formal temperament evaluations, we decide on the training program and, sometimes, the career path that best suits each puppy. Puppies demonstrating less adaptability are often the ones who prefer to be cuddled – these puppies make ideal pets. Others with high energy and strong preferences to sniff and pursue their own instinctual interests are placed as future search and rescue dogs.



The relationship and bond between the raiser and pup is part of the foundation for all the life lessons a guide dog needs to master. Raisers provide hours of patient teaching and socialization over a 12 to 16 month period.

As young adults, the pups return to Guiding Eyes for the Blind headquarters for guide dog training. All dogs receive complete physical examinations and must pass a rigorous "In for Training" evaluation before entering the training program.

Sixty percent of our raisers are repeat raisers – meaning they have raised more than one Guiding Eyes puppy.

GUIDING EYES DOG TRAINING TEAM

At about 18 months old, the puppies are passed from volunteer raiser to Guiding Eyes' professional training staff at our Headquarters and Training Center. Each dog is assigned to an instructor, who continues to build the dog-human bond and establish a trusting relationship. The instructor works with each dog for at least five months. Training is a structured and continuous process. Guide work is taught in a progression of lessons, each one building upon those that came before it, with hundreds of repetitions. A Guiding Eyes dog is ready for placement with a blind partner when the dog responds reliably and safely to all work situations it will encounter while guiding.

Training is a continuous process, but may be thought of in four phases:

Phase I - The guide dog learns the basics of forward, halt, and "hup-up" (work in a straight line while avoiding obstacles and resuming the original direction). This work is conducted at Guiding Eyes' Training Center and its surrounding neighborhood.

Phase II - Trainers reinforce the lessons of Phase I, introduce new environments (suburban villages) and unusual underfootings (such as metal gratings).

Phase III - Dogs are asked to perform learned tasks on their own initiative, without assistance from the trainer. It requires continual praise and hundreds of repetitions in different situations before the dog understands what is expected and can respond reliably to cues.

Phase IV - Dogs fine-tune their skills and apply their knowledge to new situations in larger cities and more distracting environments. In this final phase, the dogs learn "intelligent disobedience," such as refusing to obey a forward command if there is a car approaching.

GUIDING EYES TEAMS

Blind and visually impaired men and women from across the United States and around the world come to the Training Center to meet their Guiding Eyes dogs and undertake a rigorous 26-day training program, which is offered throughout the year.



Guiding Eyes is known for professionally and optimally matching each of its blind clients to our dogs. This individualized attention continues throughout our clients' instruction. Guiding Eyes makes a life-time pact with each of our blind clients – we promise that Guiding Eyes will be there for them whenever they need assistance, guidance, or support.

RETIRED DOGS

A guide dog that is retired from service usually lives with its blind partner, or the partner's family or friends as a pet. A few are returned to Guiding Eyes to be placed with their original puppy raisers or through our Retired Guide Dog Placement Program. Just as with our clients, we are committed to caring for our dogs from the moment of their birth through to the end of their lives.