A Pathfinder’s Many Paths

At a young age, Dianne Ende knew what being visually impaired meant, as one of the friends she grew up with was blind. Dianne witnessed how a guide dog changed her friend’s life, giving her freedom and confidence as she entered her college years. After a 30-year career in finance with General Motors, Dianne knew she wanted to spend her retirement years helping others. It was a natural fit for Dianne to embark on her second “career” as a volunteer puppy raiser with Guiding Eyes for the Blind, inspired by the experience of her childhood friend with whom she still keeps in touch. Dianne is currently raising her 13th Guiding Eyes dog, a yellow Lab named Cashew, and oversees 19 other puppy raisers as the puppy raising coordinator and treasurer for the Erie, New York, region.

Dianne takes great pride in providing puppy raisers in her region with the support they need, especially during this unique time. “The structure of puppy training has definitely taken on a whole new form since the COVID-19 pandemic erupted. Socializing puppies in a socially-distant world is a challenge,” says Dianne. During quarantine, puppy classes were replaced with weekly emails explaining how to include family members, pets, toys, treats, and household items as distractions while practicing and improving obedience skills and house manners. Puppy raisers shared creative videos demonstrating their at-home training techniques. As restrictions ease, raisers are taking their pups to local parks to explore nature and on walks through towns and near traffic. The outings enable puppies to practice watching other people and animals at a safe distance while remaining calm and responsive to their raiser.

In addition to her volunteer work and regional fundraising efforts, Dianne has personally contributed to Guiding Eyes for 20 years and is a valued member of the Pathfinder Society. She has frequently visited the Canine Development Center and the Training Center and is well acquainted with Guiding Eyes’ financial and operational practices. “The manner in which Guiding Eyes maximizes donations is so efficient. I’m confident in where my donations are going and how the funds are being used.”
Estate Planning When Getting Around Is a Challenge

Your estate plan is important for safeguarding the people you care about and the assets you have accumulated. Among changes in your life that can impact your long-term plans are the addition of family members, the loss of loved ones, new or different charitable priorities, significant increases or decreases in your finances, a move to another state, or new tax laws.

One prudent step is contacting an estate planning attorney to create or review your existing will or living trust. If you can’t meet in person, you can discuss your needs over the phone, via conference call, or through an online meeting. It may be possible for your attorney to come to you, making a house call while following social distancing recommendations.

Be prepared

To get ready for a discussion with your attorney, it helps if you gather the documents representing your assets and plans you’ve made previously. Your attorney can help you update your will, living trust, health care directives, and health care power of attorney documents, as well as beneficiary statements for insurance policies and retirement plan accounts.

Some documents may have to be witnessed by others or even notarized.

Learn more

With a valid will or living trust and related documents in place, you can enjoy the peace of mind that comes from knowing your affairs are in order. Contact Gail Resnikoff at (914) 243-2237 or Heather McGorman at (914) 243-2250 for more information on providing a lasting legacy to Guiding Eyes while preserving financial security for you and your loved ones.

To Give Is To Receive

How can you provide independence for someone with vision loss and get back steady annual income in return? With a charitable gift annuity, you could receive:

🔹 Dependable lifetime payments that may be partially tax-free.
🔹 The possibility of an income tax deduction, and gift and estate tax savings.
🔹 Favorable tax treatment for capital gains.

Contact us to learn more or to receive a customized gift annuity proposal.
A Will Alone May Not Be Enough

Many assets pass outside a will or living trust, such as through securities, bank accounts, and retirement accounts. Therefore, it’s important to review all beneficiary designations periodically. You should be able to review your accounts—and update your beneficiary designations—without even leaving home. A thorough evaluation of your paperwork may be all that is needed, or contact your account administrator to verify your account’s beneficiary information.

**Joint ownership considerations**

Assets held jointly pass automatically to the surviving joint owner. That’s generally the goal in the case of married couples. But even if you intend for the joint owner to inherit everything, consider naming a contingent beneficiary to receive the assets if your joint owner doesn’t survive you.

**Retirement plans—be specific**

Retirement plan accounts are, for many people, their largest assets. There are specifics about inheritance you need to know. For example, if you are married, federal law requires that your 401(k) plan (but not an IRA) automatically pass to your surviving spouse unless a spousal waiver has been signed. And if you list a beneficiary on your IRA custodian’s form, be sure that your beneficiary designation does not conflict with any provision of your existing or future will or living trust.

**A charitable beneficiary**

You can name Guiding Eyes as the beneficiary of retirement accounts, often with favorable tax results. Since retirement plan assets can be heavily taxed if left to heirs, you may want to consider leaving all or a portion of these funds to your charitable interests while leaving other assets to loved ones. These changes are simple to make and don’t require you to change your will. Charities can also be the beneficiaries of securities and bank accounts. To learn more, please contact us.

Did You Know?

- At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, 176 dogs were strategically moved—over a three-day period—out of the Guiding Eyes Training Kennel and temporarily into the caring homes of volunteers and staff.
- Using belt clips or chest-mounted holsters for cell phones allows remote guide dog handlers to share live action scenarios with guide dog mobility trainers and receive immediate feedback.
- Guide dogs learn to lead around obstacles and are responsible for a space two times as wide and up to three times as tall as themselves to keep their handlers safe.

Siblings Gaucho and Gustav out for some fresh fall air.
When Eric Caron was a toddler, his parents learned that he had retinitis pigmentosa, a genetic disorder of the eyes that would cause Eric to slowly lose his vision. Eric was using a white cane by the time he reached high school, but he didn’t let his vision loss detract from his goals. He studied hard and later attended the University of Albany in New York where he became friends with a Guiding Eyes graduate. Though he had known other guide dog users, Eric was thoroughly impressed with how rock solid the Guiding Eyes team was.

After college, Eric became a high school guidance counselor. Though his eyesight continued to decline, Eric wasn’t sure if he would qualify for a guide dog. His fiancée encouraged him to contact Guiding Eyes, and he was paired up with his first guide dog, a yellow Lab named Scarlett, in 1997. “Looking back, I wish I had applied years earlier,” shared Eric. “But at least I had time to build a bond with Scarlett before completely losing my vision.” Eric recently graduated with his fourth Guiding Eyes guide dog, Flyer, and is the first home-trained individual to graduate during the COVID pandemic.

Despite major changes in how training was conducted because of COVID, Eric was pleased with how much preparation went into training beforehand and the measures that followed. He and his instructor conferenced through video to assess Eric’s home and work environments in Brattleboro, Vermont; reviewed safety protocols for daily interaction and the exchange of equipment; and discussed how they would communicate during training while maintaining a safe distance. To replace common public distractions, Eric creatively orchestrated training scenarios with the help of neighbors waving, riding bikes, and walking with their dogs. “This training was a quality event that has given me back the freedom and joy of traveling with a guide dog,” said Eric.

Not only is Eric a returning graduate, but he is also a mentor for new guide dog users, fundraiser, supporter, and has included Guiding Eyes in his will to help secure the future of our mission.

Eric Caron with Flyer celebrating graduation.

Guiding Eyes for the Blind has provided expertly-trained guide dogs to people with vision loss at no charge for over 60 years. Please partner with us through a gift in your estate plan and, together, we can support dynamic guide dog teams for years to come. We can’t do it without you! Thank you!