**Chapter 40: Graduation Day and Rehearsal**

Graduation will be an exciting and emotional day for everyone. This chapter will discuss, in detail, exactly what will happen throughout the day, what to expect during the ceremony, and what will happen immediately afterward. Your instructors have done this many times before, but every time is new and exciting with lots of visitors and emotions running high. Try to listen carefully to instruction and do your very best to be on time to help everything go off without a hitch. If you have family or friends that would like to watch from home, the graduation ceremony is streamed live on YouTube and will be archived on the Guiding Eyes web site for you to view and share later.

The schedule for the day will look something like this:

6:00am Wake up call, as usual.

7:00am Breakfast

8:00-11:00am During the morning hours, everyone will take part in a final rehearsal, including lining up in order and having your dog work to your chair. We will then run through all aspects of the ceremony. You may receive Take Home Packets (if you have not done so previously), and instructors will make arrangements for all the dogs to have some sort of energy outlet prior to graduation. This may be group playtimes or a nice walk nearby. Instructors will let you know the exact plan for your class.

11:00am Water and Park

11:30-12:00 Lunch. Lunch is served early to allow extra time for you to get yourselves ready before the ceremony. Please try to be finished with lunch no later than 12:00, as the kitchen will be prepping for donor and raiser receptions as well.

1:00pm Park time. Instructors will knock on your park doors to alert you when it is time to park.

1:15pm Begin lining up. Instructors will knock on your hallway door when it is time to come out.

1:30-2:30pm Graduation ceremony.

2:30pm Puppy raiser greetings and refreshments in Rosie’s Cafe.

3:00pm Kennel Tour

4:00pm Feed, Water, and Park

5:00pm Pizza dinner! Please inform instructors and kitchen staff if you plan on going out to dinner.

After breakfast, we will have our final rehearsal in Alumni Hall, with folding chairs for the audience having been set up the afternoon before. As you enter the doors to Alumni Hall, there will be two aisles leading through the audience to the far side of the room where chairs will be set for graduates. By this time, you will have had opportunity to work on teaching your dog to target your seat. You will practice one last time during morning rehearsal. Keep in mind that when we come in for the actual ceremony, the room will be packed with people and there will be lots of electric energy in the air. Your dog may not be able to focus as well as during practice. You can ask for sighted guide at any time if you feel your dog is too distracted. During this final rehearsal, we will review the order of events for the entire program. The ceremony will include the class speakers, a presentation by the Canine Development Center, recognition of each puppy raiser, and presentation of your diplomas. You can remain seated as your instructor hands you the diploma and shakes your hand. Speakers can practice getting to the podium and we will do several rounds of clapping. Many dogs are initially startled by applause, and it helps to practice so everyone knows what to expect. Keep in mind that there will likely be other graduates with guide dogs in the audience, and at one point there will be a couple of puppies brought in by the CDC. The puppies will be held by volunteers, but your dog may get excited when they come in. It’s a good idea to reach down and check in with your dog periodically. Offer a bit of praise if they are behaving well, or quietly remind them to ‘Stay’ if they seem interested in dogs in front of them. In the unlikely case that a dog begins to act up excessively during the ceremony, an instructor may step in and assist you in escorting your dog out of the room.

Many puppy raisers will arrive on campus early, and it is best for all concerned if they do not see the dogs they raised until after graduation. With that in mind, dogs should be kept in your room after 11:00 park time. Everyone will leave their dogs in their rooms during lunch, and we advise that you keep to your room as much as possible after lunch as well. Many raisers, donors, and other visitors will be touring the building prior to the ceremony. So, if you do need to move about the building, please leave your dog behind. Around 1:00, we will knock on your park door and ask you to bring your dog out to park prior the ceremony. Please wait for someone to knock before heading out. Instructors will need to run interference so no one can approach you or your dog in the park area. Once everyone has finished parking, dogs should be harnessed and we will begin knocking on your doors and assembling in the hallway in the order that you will enter graduation. Again, please wait for instructors to let you know it is time to come out. Often, we will need to wait for the hallways to clear before lining up. The Team Lead will then open the ceremony. We will escort you one at a time into Alumni Hall, and make sure you are lined up with the aisle. When your name is announced, you’ll send your dog Forward and work to your seat at the front (remember you can opt for sighted guide at any time). Once at your chair, take a seat and position your dog underneath. You can help out the person sitting next to you by lightly tapping their seat as they approach. Once everyone has been introduced and taken their seat, the ceremony will proceed, hopefully just as we rehearsed it earlier.

**What to Expect when Greeted by Puppy Raisers**

As the ceremony closes, raisers will be asked to wait a few moments before approaching graduates. You can take off your dog's harness and place it on your chair along with your diploma so that you have both hands free. Typically, the dogs will not have noticed that their puppy raisers are in the audience, but when the raisers come to say hello it will be a different story. When your dog recognizes their raiser, they will often become very excitable and may behave quite differently than what you are used to. In this moment, it is okay to allow this outburst of excitement. Try to keep the leash as loose as possible and let the dog visit and interact. Try to stay relaxed and understand that the dog will begin to calm down after a few minutes. The raiser may start to give the dog commands in an effort to help calm him down. If you choose, you can even offer to let the raiser hold your dog's leash until they calm down a bit. Sometimes this makes it easier to prevent the leash wrapping around everyone, but if you prefer to keep hold of the leash yourself, that is fine too. Refrain from giving leash corrections as your dog is greeting their raiser. After a minute or two, they will settle back down and resume their usual level of responsiveness. Instructors will be standing by to observe these greetings and will step in if things get out of hand. We can also assist in escorting you to another part of the building as needed.

After the initial greeting, you can spend some time talking with the raisers. Refreshments will be available in Rosie’s Café and the rest of the building is available for everyone to spread out. It is preferred that you do not attempt to work your dog through the building following graduation. They will likely have some difficulty focusing after all the excitement and the hallways will still be crowded with people.

A kennel tour will be given approximately 30 minutes after the ceremony ends. You may go if you like, but your dog should remain in your room. The main reason is that your dog has been out of the kennel environment for some time and we don’t want to cross contaminate any viruses or bacteria back to your dog. If your puppy raiser does not want to go on the tour, please stay with them – they are here for only a short time to visit with you and your dog. Most people will leave the school by 4:00 pm. Your puppy raisers may offer to take you out to dinner. If you chose to go out, please let the instructors know and leave your dog in your room.

*Updated September 2020*