**Guiding Eyes Graduate Quarterly Call, April 30, 2023 summary**

**Topic: Introducing the 2023-2024 Graduate Council Members and Officers**

**Andrea Conner welcomed everyone. Andrea stated that it has been an honor to serve on the graduate Council. She held the offices of President, Vice President and Recording Secretary during her term. “There have been a number of changes at Guiding Eyes, and we have learned to successfully adapt to them.” Andrea thanked everyone for the support she has received. She then introduced the new Council President, Jywanza Maye.**

**Jywanza first thanked the outgoing members of the Graduate Council: Deborah Groeber, Ann Chiappetta and Andrea Conner. However, Andrea will serve as President Emeritus for the next year, 2023-2024.**

**Jywanza introduced the current Council Officers, who will serve in their respective position during 2023-2024.**

**Graduate Council President Jywanza is working a Black Labrador Retriever named Wyatt. Born and raised in Brooklyn, Jywanza now resides in Indianapolis.**

**Graduate Council Vice-President is Jose Lopez-Masso. Jose resides in Florida with his third guide dog, Louis, his wife and daughter.**

**Cindy LaBon of Gaithersburg, Maryland, will serve as the Graduate Council recording secretary. Cindy is working her second guide dog, Goodman. She resides in the Montgomery region where many GEB pups are raised.**

**Pat Leahy will serve as Graduate Council corresponding secretary. Pat is working guide dog Hogan, his fourth from GEB. They live on Capital Hill in Washington, DC.**

**The returning members of the Graduate Council were then introduced.**

**Tina Reisner with guide dog Kahlua, is originally from Chicago, currently living in Salt Lake City, Utah.**

**Becky Davidson and guide dog Ballad reside in Charlotte, North Carolina.**

**The new Council members were then introduced. Along with Jose, they will serve a three-year term.**

**Tim Utzig resides in Washington, DC and is working his first guide dog, Alisa.**

**Ashley Townsend and running guide dog Lolly, live in Denver, Colorado.**

**A vacated seat on the Council, with two years remaining, was filled by Judy Mathews. Judy and her second guide dog, Keats, live in Colorado Springs, Colorado with her husband.**

**Next week, Jywanza will send out the contact information for the members of the Graduate Council with email addresses and phone numbers provided. There is also an email address that reaches the entire graduate council. It is:** [**gebgradcouncil@gmail.com**](mailto:gebgradcouncil@gmail.com)**. The mailbox is monitored by a designated Council member.**

**Jywanza opened the floor for questions/comments.**

**Q. Has the role of the Graduate Council changed with the evolution of the Client Experience Team?**

**A. Becky Davidson said the role of the Council has not changed.**

**Q. What are the future goals of the Graduate Council?**

**A. Jose said that one of the goals is to improve communication between the graduate council and the Guiding Eyes management team.**

**Q. A graduate requested a summary of the most prevalent changes to the Guiding Eyes campus.**

**A. Melissa Carney, Community Outreach and Graduate Support Manager, said that a ramp has replaced the stairs leading up to Rosie’s Café. (The dining room). Many of the dorm rooms in Alumni Hall have also been renovated to be more conducive to color contrast and lighting for low-vision students. Also, since the onset of the pandemic, GEB has begun operating on a two-week class model. Students arrive on a Monday and leave on a Saturday, so it’s just under a two-week period. During those two weeks, there are only four to five students on campus, working with two instructors. This means that it is a more customizable experience. You have more one-on-one time with an instructor to work on environments that are relevant to you. Some fundamental skills (e.g., grooming, feeding, Etc.), go across all guide dog platforms and are part of the general on-campus program. The way Dogs are trained has also changed; the cycle being twenty weeks. Beyond those twenty weeks, some dogs go into the Specialized Training Program. Within those initial twenty weeks, dogs train with Foundational Instructors, then transition to working with the Placement Specialist, who work with the students in class. The foundation instructor usually does not go into class; thus, the dogs are not distracted by encountering the person who trained them. During class, you do have the option of meeting the person who trained your dog for those twenty weeks. Placement Specialists only pertain to residential training. Home Training is an entirely separate program.**

**Andrea added that security of the Guiding Eyes building has increased significantly. Every room has a keypad entry. The building is also locked. Each student is given a fob to reenter the building If they exit because the doors automatically lock. The entire campus is gated. There is a code to get through the gate and onto the grounds.**

**Q. The subject of home training was raised.**

**A. Melissa Carney said that the team success rate with home training done by RGDMI’s (Regional Guide Dog Mobility Instructors) is 98%. There have been almost no errors in the matching process.**

**q. Is the shortened class time impacting the wait time to get into class?**

**A. Melissa said that the wait time has not changed. Guiding Eyes is still coming out of the impact COVID had. Previously, classes were three weeks in length, with ten to twelve students. After the three weeks of class training, there was a one week break before another class began. Now, because GEB is having consistent two-week classes that run every two weeks, we are graduating the same number of teams. Guiding Eyes has also increased the number of RGDMI’s from six to eight, adding Jim Gardner and Nikki Wentz. This increases the number of home trainings done throughout the year.**

**A graduate thanked the outgoing Graduate Council members. She encouraged the new Council members to try a variety of different approaches in their work.**

**Q. Are the kennels running at full capacity again since COVID?**

**A. Melissa said the kennels are indeed running at full capacity. Plans are underway to modernize the kennels. There are currently between 150 and 160 dogs in the kennels.**

**Q. What is being done to address the kennel cough outbreak situation that sometimes occurs in the kennels?**

**A. Jywanza said that more modern kennels will allow dogs who become ill to be separated from the general canine population. Melissa said that kennel cough happens at every school. Guiding Eyes simply wants to be transparent when problems arise. The goal with a more modern kennel is for dogs to be placed in a pod format. This lessens the risk of contamination.**

**Q. Can graduates with hearing loss or other barriers have access to what takes place in the Zoom meetings?**

**A. Jywanza said that, with the exception of the October, 2022 meeting, the summaries have always been available. Melissa said that a summary, rather than a transcript, is made available on the Graduate Center page of the Guiding Eyes website. This page no longer requires a password, which has significantly decreased accessibility issues for graduates.**

**Cindy LaBon reiterated that it is a time-consuming process in creating a summary from the Zoom transcript of the meeting. Each Council member is expected to do a minimum of twenty volunteer hours of work per month. Also, during the meeting, captioning is enabled, so those using Braille displays are able to access the live captions while the meeting takes place.**

**Q. A graduate asked about the bylaws and the role of the President Emeritus of the graduate council.**

**A. The President Emeritus is not a voting member of the graduate council. The President Emeritus will advise the President for a term of one year. The role was created to prevent a vacuum when one President leaves and a new President comes in. It is a way to support the Council during a time of transition.**

**Comment from Cindy - there are currently 20,791 working guide dog teams worldwide.**

**Q. Will the newsletter ever be re-instated?**

**A. Melissa said Guiding Eyes is attempting to find a more modern approach to the newsletter that does not involve CD’s or cassettes, both of which are no longer available in bulk. A podcast is one possibility at some point in the future.**

**Q. A graduate asked about the hybrid guide dog training model.**

**A. Two individuals had work conflicts, but still wanted the residential training experience. They did part of their training on campus and finished their training with a GDMI at home. Students will be evaluated on an individual basis to see what format best accommodates their schedules.**

**A graduate commented that the relieving belt on her dog has been very helpful for her. GDMI’s or someone with sight needs to work with the guide dog team in order to make sure the graduate knows how to use the belt safely.**

**Jywanza said the Graduate Council members no longer serve particular regions; every region of the United States is served collectively.**

**The RGDMI territories are not listed on the Guiding eyes website. Anyone needing that information should contact Melissa Carney.**

**Jywanza said the only Quarterly Call with a firm topic is the April event. Other Quarterly Calls are open to suggestions from graduates.**

**Pat Leahy announced the new Guiding Eyes Book Club. The inaugural book club discussion will take place on Tuesday, May 23, at 7PM Eastern Time. The first book is Trusting Calvin by Sharon Peters. The BARD book number for Trusting Calvin is: DB77282.**

**The book club committee is also working on getting an occasional guest for the book club meetings.**

**Any questions or comments can be sent via email to:** [**guidedogbookclub@gmail.com**](mailto:guidedogbookclub@gmail.com)

**The Quarterly Call was adjourned by Graduate Council President Jywanza May.**