GEB Graduate Quarterly Call, April 24, 2022 Recap

Topic: Introducing the 2022-2023 Guiding Eyes Council Members and Officers

Andrea Conner, Graduate Council President, opened the meeting with a greeting and request for anyone wishing to talk to announce their name before speaking.

Melissa Carney, Community Outreach and Graduate Support Manager, welcomed everyone. She started working at Guiding Eyes in November 2021. She graduated in May of 2016 with Aron, her yellow Lab. She gave a summary of her past experience with various organizations and her advocacy work. She expressed her desire to assist grads with any discrimination issues and will develop helpful resources.

Introduction of Graduate Council members and Officers

Andrea Conner, President

Andrea expressed her appreciation for the support the staff, GEB community and the Council members have given her. She joined the Guiding Eyes family in August 2008 when she trained with her first guide dog, Lopez. Gretzky, a male yellow Lab, is Andrea’s second GEB dog. They have been a working team for six years. She discussed a Dunkin’ Donuts route and how it is one of Gretzky’s favorite targets.

Becky Davidson, Vice President

Becky greeted everyone. She shared that she received her first Guiding Eyes dog, Rowan, in 1995. She is now on her fourth guide dog, Ballad, a female yellow Lab, that she received June, 2019. Becky worked at Guiding Eyes in a similar position as Melissa, from 1999 until she retired in 2020. After retiring from GEB, she is happy to stay involved with GEB through her work on the Graduate Council, giving her the opportunity to work from the graduate’s perspective.

Cindy LaBon, Recording Secretary

Cindy is working her first guide dog, Gardenia. The team loves targeting - a helpful training tool. Cindy has applied for a successor guide; eleven-year-old Gardenia deserves a happy retirement. Cindy stated that she knows that it will be difficult, however, she knows that it is best for their safety, and Gardenia’s comfort in retirement. Cindy said that it has been an absolute pleasure to be on the Council, a family like environment, and encouraged graduates to apply. She enjoys contacting new graduates, collecting their feedback for the Exit Survey - one of the Council’s tasks.

Patrick Leahy, Corresponding Secretary

Pat began by stating that it has been a pleasure getting to know everyone on the Council. Pat has had four fantastic dogs from Guiding Eyes over the past 29 years. His current match is a five-year-old yellow Lab named Hogan, raised in the Cleveland suburbs. Pat does stand up improv comedy, taking a class on location at a comedy club in downtown DC near their home. Hogan is excited to be part of the action, jumping out of the UBER when they arrive at the club and is ready to go right in. He loves his job, is a happy go lucky dog, but very serious when in harness. Pat works for the Federal Government, US Elections Assistance Commission. His work focuses on the process of elections and best practices. Pat gave an open invite to contact him for questions or to just shoot the breeze.

Ann Chiappetta, Council Member

Annie is working her second dog, Bailey, a big yellow Lab. He is nine-years-old as of the day of the meeting, April 24. Annie shared that she has come to understand the bond between a dog and their human because of the opportunities that Guiding Eyes gave her when she received her first guide dog in 2009. Annie served on the Graduate Council in 2011, 2012 and 2013; holding the offices of Recording Secretary and President during her term. Annie is glad to be on the Council again. She enjoys creating and putting out the monthly Pill Reminders. Being on the Council helps her to stay connected with the graduate community and learn more about GEB; how this community makes the wheel move forward. She has met many wonderful people in this role!

Jywanza Maye, Council Member

Jywanza was born in Brooklyn, New York. After graduating from high school in 1995, he went to Guiding Eyes and trained with his first guide dog. He is currently working his third GEB dog, Wyatt, a black male Lab, who turns seven on August 1st. Jywanza now lives in Indianapolis, Indiana, working for the Department of Defense (DOD). Giving back to Guiding Eyes and the community is important to Jywanza, so he applied for a seat on the Council. He loves meeting the graduates and is willing to connect via text, telephone or email.

Nate Kile, Council Member

Nate graduated with his first guide, Edgar in August of 2017. Edgar will be seven in August. They reside in Alaska, where Nate works as the Program Director at The Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually impaired. Nate likes getting outside with his dogs, playing his guitar, and connecting with people in the blind community. He is glad to be part of the Council and looks forward to learning and contributing to the community.

Tyler Shaffer, Council Member

Tyler is from Portland, Maine. He graduated in 2020 with his first Guiding Eyes dog, Edric, a 90-pound yellow Lab. Edric spent his puppy time training with his raiser in New York on a college campus, which fit well with Tyler’s life-style as a college student. Edric worked this new campus like a pro! Tyler is now studying to get into law school. Tyler is super excited to be on the Council, getting to know everyone and is very thankful for the opportunity.

Andrea announced that Deborah Groeber, Council member, was unable to attend the meeting.

Onset of Q&A

A graduate commented that she recently graduated with her new guide, a black Lab, after completing Home Training. She is excited to be able to join the call and will be reaching out with questions.

A graduate welcomed everyone and shared having done Andrea’s Exit Survey after she and Gretzky graduated.

A graduate welcomed the three new members and thanked the entire Council for serving.

A graduate asked about the new upcoming position of the Client Navigator and the Client Experience Team.

Melissa responded that it is a team that will enhance what Guiding Eyes already does best and the team will be there to support graduates. This will help to continue creating a family like experience for the GEB community. Melissa then announced an upcoming call on May 8th that will discuss the new team and help to answer any questions.

A graduate welcomed the new members. Her GEB guide dog retired last year. She looks forward to getting her new guide dog and sharing her feedback on the Exit Survey form with a Council member.

A graduate, and also a former Council member, wanted to know what areas (city/state) the Council members cover when doing the Exit Surveys.

Andrea responded that she reads through new graduate profiles, then pairs a graduate with a Council member who may have some common interest with the new graduate, not basing it on location. She wants there to be an opportunity for relationship building between the new grad and the Council member.

A graduate was curious about the International Dog Day Fund. Guiding Eyes is participating in the fundraiser, with a goal of raising $50,000.00 through matched donations.

A graduate thanked the Council and new members. She mentioned that she is a Pampered Chef Consultant, having done fundraisers to benefit Guiding Eyes and is currently doing another Pampered Chef party that will close on May 1. She provided her contact information for anyone interested in supporting it.

A graduate mentioned that he is a 1st time guide dog handler of a black and tan German Shepherd. He thanked the Council and hopes to participate in the community more in the future.

Annie asked if anyone register for the service dog eye exam. She registered Bailey and will report back on her experience.

A graduate shared that she took both her current and previous guides for the free eye exam. She is thankful that she has taken her dogs, particularly her current guide. The vet saw something in her eye that required extra tests to make sure that there weren’t any problems, all done at no cost. She encouraged everyone to take advantage of the free program.

Another graduate encouraged everyone to take advantage of the free eye exam. During her guide dog’s exam, abnormalities were detected. Further testing with unfavorable results determined he needed to retire.

A graduate mentioned that he was going to a VCB program and looking for advice.

Annie responded that she has been to the Rockland campus a couple of times. The facility is great, the staff is nice and some of the people there also have guide dogs.

Becky reminded graduates where to find the Council contact list on the website. She also explained everything that is on the contact list: names, phone numbers and email addresses for all Council members.

Andrea further expanded that the contact list will be posted on the grad email list and Facebook groups. She encouraged the grads to go onto the GEB webpage and read the bios of the Council members.

Closing remarks from Andrea followed by rollcall.