



Spring 2013 volume 28 number 2

## College Degrees And Careers

GDA Graduates Become Students Again With Their Guides

Many GDA graduates complete, start or return to college with their guide dogs. Meet three of our graduates who have pursued their college degrees and join us in congratulating each of them on their significant accomplishments.



Michelle Plunkett and Noble

### With the greatest of ease...

GDA graduate Michelle Plunkett lost her vision during her sophomore year in college but she never lost her desire to pursue her dream of becoming a high school physics teacher; however, she did have to take a detour when a stroke brought on by a severe food allergy took her vision.

The stroke left her with no vision and with little to no function on her left side.

In addition to learning how to walk again, the avid athlete also had to learn Braille. After a year of physical therapy, she was walking again and in May 2012 with Noble, her first guide dog from GDA, at her side, she graduated from Georgia Institute of Technology with a degree in physics. This past fall, she started working toward a master's degree in secondary education and plans to teach high school physics when she graduates. She is already substituting at high schools in her community.

"Noble has been amazing. I'm very independent and didn't know if I could give up control to a guide dog. Three years into it, I couldn't live without him," said Plunkett.

In addition to her studies and teaching, she has also resumed physical activities that she once thought were not possible. She is even running marathons. Last year she ran the New York Marathon and, currently, she is training for her first triathlon. When she is not studying, teaching or training, she is coaching colorguard for the local high school band,

an activity that was a part of her life for nine years and in which she competed internationally. Noble, ever-present at Plunkett's side, has taken on the role of mascot. And there's one more thing that Plunkett does with "the greatest of ease" — she has taken up trapeze and "silks" (fabric that wraps around the body while performing aerial acrobatics).

"It's a skill I took up after I went blind," explained Plunkett. "I have better awareness of my movement and without the visual effect of spinning; it keeps me from getting sick. It took Noble a while to get used to having me 30 to 40 feet up in the air, but he's used to it now."

For Plunkett and Noble, graduating has always been a goal that would take them to that next step. First as GDA graduates, then, two years later, as college under grads. In one more year, the two will take the commencement walk once again.

"GDA did an amazing job pairing us. Noble is as eager to learn and experience new things as I am," said Plunkett. "We are like two peas in a pod."



Jeff Hedberg and Wrangler

### "Wrangling" hardware and software to make them more user-friendly for people with disabilities...

Jeff Hedberg's vision loss went from having a hard time reading the newspaper to needing adaptive technologies. One such technology is CCTV, a closed circuit television in which a television/video camera combination enables people who are visually impaired to magnify the print.

"In a bright light, I see shadows. It's like you are looking in a Kaleidoscope without colors," explained

Hedberg. "I can still see if the object is enlarged using a CCTV and if I am very close to it."

Hedberg received his first guide dog from GDA in his mid-20s when his vision loss accelerated due to a condition that is similar to macular degeneration. Now in his mid-40s, Hedberg has returned to college with Wrangler, his fourth guide dog from GDA. This spring Hedberg completed the prerequisite work to gain admission and pursue a master's degree in vocational rehabilitation with an emphasis on adaptive technologies and will start classes at a Wisconsin university this fall.

The married father of two has an interest in information technology (IT) that extends beyond understanding the way computers are put together and the way networks work. Hedberg's emphasis on adaptive technologies means that he will be working with the engineers and programmers to make the hardware and software they develop more user-friendly.

"For the most part, software and web pages are created for the sighted populace and are least effective for the blind populace; they are challenging to use for other types of disabilities, too," said Hedberg. "There is a lot of room for improvement in adaptive software and hardware products. I want to help bridge and narrow the gap that exists. It's all about helping people with disabilities adapt to their environment so kids can go to school and learn, and people can do their jobs."

Hedberg said that Wrangler "hangs tight" with him throughout their busy days. "We may start our day as early as 4 a.m. Some days, we don't get home until 8 or 9 p.m. It can be a long day, but he's always ready and always maintains an appropriate demeanor."

But it's not all work and no play for this busy guide dog team. When they are not in school they enjoy outdoor activities no matter the season. "In the winter, I'll go snowshoeing, and Wrangler runs along on the trails and, in summer, you can find us on the lake. We'll go out with the family on the pontoon boat and fish, and Wrangler will go for a swim in the lake. He loves to swim."

Hedberg, has had vision loss to some degree all of his life and he has had a guide dog for half of his life.

"Hands down you are much better off with a guide dog than with a cane," said Hedberg. "A cane will not tell you that there is something around you or overhead. And a dog is more reliable than a person when they are guiding you. People get distracted; the dog is more focused on you."

He credits the trainers at GDA with giving each of his dogs that focus. "The trainers are absolutely wonderful," said Hedberg. "The school is a very special place. The whole staff has always been very personable, helpful and caring. It is a very homey environment and that helps."



Terri Kruger and Pontero

### A new way of seeing myself...

When Terri Kruger went back to school after receiving her guide dog, Pontero from GDA, she wanted to gain a degree in something she knew she was really good at. Married for 30 years and having raised two daughters, both now in their early 20s, Kruger went with what she knew and felt she was best at ... marriage and family. In May 2012, she and Pontero graduated with a master's in Marriage and Family Therapy.

Kruger was born legally blind with limited non-correctible vision due to anaridia. This rare eye condition in combination with glaucoma, cataracts and corneal disease make what would usually be considered "routine" eye surgery extremely complicated. Kruger was told from an early age to avoid cataract surgery as long as possible. In 1994, she did have surgery in an effort not to go blind. This started a "roller coaster of surgeries" lasting nearly 20 years. In 2003, surgery complications left her totally blind until she regained a little bit of sight after a corneal transplant. Kruger lost her vision while her daughters were in high school.

"I always wondered when I was going to be 'blind enough' for a guide dog," said Kruger. However, before she could get a dog, she had to go through orientation and mobility (O&M) training, which included learning to use a cane. "I broke three canes trying to get the hang of going around rather than into things."

Ironically, it was when she started using a cane that she began to feel more connected to people. "Because my eyes looked a little different, I felt different, and didn't know quite how to approach people," explained Kruger. "When I got the cane, I had a tool for people to understand that I see things differently." Kruger completed her O&M training and applied to GDA. She graduated with Pontero in 2007.

"I was so nervous because I didn't know if I was going to do blind OK.", admitted Kruger. "This was the first opportunity I had in my life to be with others who really understood where I was coming from. The trainers and staff were wonderful mentors and teachers. They provided me with a new way of seeing myself. It was such a positive and rich experience for me." And, it was an experience that gave her the confidence to return to college. "Pontero has given me a link to the sighted world that I had not had before. Having him has allowed me to connect with people. The barrier goes away because everybody wants to talk about Pontero," said Kruger.

In May 2012, the guide dog team walked together to accept Kruger's diploma, both in hood and gown. Kruger has started working on the 3,000 hours of clinical training needed to receive her license. They are half way through the process. "I could not have accomplished any of this without Pontero. He has far exceeded any expectations," said Kruger. 🐾

## Donor Spotlight — Barry Stone



Partner In Trust Barry Stone has always loved dogs and has had one in his life since he was 8 years old. He first learned about Guide Dogs of America a little more than 10 years ago when he walked into his local music store. There, near the register, he saw a beautiful dog. As a dog lover, Stone couldn't resist the urge to approach the dog and be

playful with him. Soon he learned, from the dog's partner, Nanlyn Bearden, that this was not just any dog — it was her guide dog...her eyes.

After that day, Bearden became Stone's piano teacher, but he has learned so much more than music from her and the three guide dogs she has had from Guide Dogs of America. She has taught him about what it means to be blind and what a difference a guide dog makes in a blind person's life. Early in their friendship, Bearden took him to a GDA Open House, where he marveled over the training that goes into the making of a guide dog and what the dogs do. "I was in absolute awe of everything I saw. The facility. The trainers. And, of course, the dogs."

A few years ago, Stone's vision began to deteriorate as he developed cataracts. "I had failed the test at the DMV. I could see everything, but it was blurry."

Surgery to remove the cataracts was a success, but he recognizes that not everyone has eye problems that a doctor can fix. "For the ones that can't be fixed, they have Guide Dogs of America. I thought there was no way to replace eyesight — but having a guide dog sure would help if you can't," said Stone.

Stone, now 75, has been donating to GDA for more than 10 years, "Whenever I have a little extra money." More recently, he has become a Partner In Trust. His generous gift to GDA will help someone he doesn't know benefit from a guide dog.

"If anybody would lose their eyesight for two days — or just have fuzziness like I did before I had my surgery — they wouldn't have to ask why give to GDA," said Stone.

His chance meeting with Bearden and her guide dog and his ongoing friendship with her has had a profound effect on Stone and his desire to help those like her.

"Obviously, years ago, a caring soul donated so a guide dog was possible for Nanlyn. I want to make a difference for someone and give back in the same way," said Stone.

## Vet's Corner

### Warm Weather Safety Tips



Summer, and the warmer days it brings, is right around the corner. Knowing the heat-related health conditions and safety concerns for your dog can help keep summer from turning into a bummer for your dog and you.

The following warm weather safety tips are provided by GDA's Vet Department:

- With the warm weather of summer comes an increase in pests — such as fleas, ticks, and mosquitoes — so now's the time to make sure you're stocked up on flea, tick and heartworm prevention treatments.
- Hot summer days means an increased risk of dehydration and heat stroke, so make sure that your dog has access to plenty of water and shade. Limit strenuous activity during the hottest parts of the day.
- Brachycephalic breeds (flat-faced dogs) and dogs with thick coats are at a greater risk of developing heat related

problems. Older dogs, overweight dogs, and those with certain health issues are also more sensitive to heat. These dogs should be kept indoors when possible, and extra care should be taken with them on extremely hot days.

- Asphalt and other surfaces that easily retain heat should be avoided in order to prevent burns to sensitive paw pads.
- Never leave dogs unattended in parked cars. Not only is it potentially deadly, but it is also illegal in some states.
- Summer also means picnics and parties but with all that tempting food lying around make sure to keep a close eye on your dog. Foods commonly found at picnics and barbeques can lead to a number of problems if ingested, including intestinal obstructions, gastroenteritis and pancreatitis. Corn, chicken bones and fatty foods can be especially troublesome.
- Fireworks can be startling to many animals so it is important to keep animals inside and calm if fireworks are being used near your home.

There are many summer activities that you and your dog can do together but make sure to remember our warm weather safety tips so that your dog can enjoy the summer as much as you do.

## Some Gifts Have To Change Hands In Order To Change A Life

We hear so many heartfelt speeches from our puppy raisers at graduation as they watch the puppy they have raised graduate with their blind partner as a guide dog team. Recently, one in particular stood out that we would like to share with you, as many in attendance wanted a copy. The following is an excerpt from the speech that was given by Collin Hart at the graduation of Denali and her new partner Rachele Goeman.



Collin Hart and Denali

In the Alaskan language, "Denali" means "the great one," and she most certainly is. She was named after the mountain in Alaska. I chose that name because it was my hope that, as a guide dog, she would help her partner safely navigate the mountains in his or her life.

Of course, the most common question I was asked as a puppy raiser was "How can you give her up?" I used to answer with a quote I had frequently overheard my mom say: "Some gifts have to change hands in order to change a life." When I answered, it was always with her future partner in mind. I never imagined that it was my own life that would also be changed.

I've never been a very outgoing person. "Shy," "quiet," "introverted" — those labels have all been used at one time or another to describe me. But with Denali by my side I found my inner voice. Everywhere we went, people commented on what a beautiful, well-behaved dog she was. I no longer had to struggle to come up with a topic to start a conversation — I was too busy responding to questions about her training and her future as a guide dog.

I knew that Denali's future was ultimately up to her; I could not "make" her into something she was not. She had to choose to be a guide dog. But when turn-in day came, I knew that whatever her future was, she had already shaped mine. I had the privilege of raising Denali for 18 months. And by the end of our time together, I found that with or without her leash in hand, I stood a little taller, spoke a little louder, and did so much more confidently than before.

Some gifts do need to change hands in order to change a person's life. My plan was for Denali to make a difference in one person's life. Actually, I think she has touched every person that she has come into contact with. She's a very special dog.

Rachele, I know that Denali will help you live, and live well. And that's how I can give her up.



Rachele Goeman and Denali

## New Beginnings For Two GDA Employees



Andi Krusoe with (from left) Farley and Emmett

### Andi Krusoe Retires as Admissions and Graduate Services

GDA's Manager of Admissions and Graduate Services Andi Krusoe, who started her career at GDA more than 23 years ago, will retire this spring.

Andi has personally reviewed thousands of applications and contacted each person to answer questions and to help them through the process. She has been the first contact visually impaired individuals have with GDA's admission process. Many students have received Andi's warm, welcoming greeting several times over the years as they retire one dog and return to the school for their next. Andi is loved by everyone at GDA, but it is the students and graduates who are always quick to include mention of Andi and the kindness, compassion and understanding she has given them from their first conversation until long after they have graduated.

When asked what she has loved about her job all of these years she said, "I love the fact that every day is different, whether a class is in the dorm or I'm talking on the phone with people interested in our program. Each person is so unique, special and remarkable in what they share about their lives." The same can be said for Andi. She is unique, special and remarkable and she will be missed by the staff and the students. Please join us in thanking Andi for her years of dedicated service to GDA and in wishing her many happy years of retirement.



### Patty Elizondo, Licensed Guide Dog Instructor, Has a New Role

Transitioning into Andi's position is a familiar face at GDA, Patty Elizondo. After joining the GDA Training Department in 2006, Patty served her three-year apprenticeship and became a fully licensed guide dog instructor in 2009. She has

helped to train numerous guide dogs and guide dog teams during that time. In preparation for her new position, Patty has been training under Andi since the beginning of the year. Please join us in congratulating Patty on her new position.

## New Employees

Erin Karol, Veterinary Assistant

Alberto Molina Jr., Kennel Technician

# Partners in Trust



The Partners in Trust Society was established as a way to recognize and honor the generosity of those who have included GDA in their planned giving. Providing life income gifts and bequests lets your gift continue working beyond your lifetime to help our students through a partnership with a guide dog. Charitable organizations are not subject to gift or estate taxes so your gift will continue to support Guide Dogs of America, without being diminished by the IRS.

You will receive a special "Partners In Trust" crystal jar as our thank you for the difference you are making in the lives of others through your support of Guide Dogs of America. Please call Rhonda Bissell at (818) 833-6432 for more information.

# In Memory

With sadness, we note the passing of the following guide dogs and a breeder:

- Ari – Class #330                      Sequoia – Class #351
- Charlotte – Class #361

## SPRING 2013 Order Form

Questions? Call (818) 833-6429. \*All Shipping & Handling is included\*  
Mail this entire form with your payment.

### Raffle Tickets

- 2013 Quilt Raffle — \$2 per ticket or \$10 for 6                      \$
- 2013 GDA Bike Raffle — \$5 per ticket or \$20 for 5                      \$
- Day with the Trainers — \$5 per ticket or 20 for 5                      \$

**Men's polo — Size S-XL \$38. Size 2X-3X \$40** (includes shipping & handling)

- SM    MED    LRG    XL    2XL    3XL                      \$

**Women's polo — Size S-XL \$38. Size 2X-3X \$40** (includes shipping & handling)

- SM    MED    LRG    XL    2XL    3XL                      \$

**TOTAL ENCLOSED \$**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**Credit Card** (check one)    Visa    MasterCard    Discover    AMEX  
 Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
 Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ CVC: \_\_\_\_\_  
required for credit card purchase                      3-4 digit code

**Check** (make your check payable to **Guide Dogs of America**)  
**Mail to:** Guide Dogs of America   ATTN: Spring Merchandise Order Form,  
 13445 Glenoaks Blvd., Sylmar, CA 91342   **Or use the enclosed envelope.**

# Raffles

## 2013 GDA Bike



This year, the GDA motorcycle raffle is for a 2013 Harley-Davidson Road Glide. The winning ticket will be drawn on Nov. 16 at the Guide Dogs of America's Annual Banquet in Las Vegas. (Winner need not be

present to win.) More details and photos will appear in the next newsletter.

## 2013 Quilt



"Love Comes in All Sizes" is the quilt that has been donated to GDA for this year's quilt raffle. And we "love" the talented and creative women of the Santa Clarita Valley Quilt Guild who crafted and donated this beautiful quilt. The quilt, which measures 100"x 108" (approx.), features a pooch in every panel. This size

will work for a double or queen-sized bed.

Purchase tickets using the order form on this page and mail it to GDA postmarked by Nov. 30, 2013. Tickets are \$2 each or six for \$10. The drawing will be held at the GDA December puppy raiser meeting on Dec. 14, 2013. Winner does not need to be present.

## A Day with the Trainers

### The Experience of a Lifetime

This extremely popular annual raffle prize takes you behind the scenes of GDA, where you will observe the trainers working with our incredible dogs. Two lucky people will spend "A Day with the Trainers," accompanying them on training routes; observing daily training exercises; and, after being blindfolded by a trainer — taking harness in hand and being led on a route with a dog to experience how it feels to walk with a guide dog. Winners must be at least 18 years of age and able to walk 4 to 5 miles in one day near our campus.

Use the order form included in the newsletter or purchase tickets at GDA before or on June 8 (Open House). Tickets are \$5 each or five tickets for \$20. Winners will be notified on June 14. Training day date to be announced after the drawing.

# Merchandise



## Polo Shirt

Red, knit polo shirt with red embroidered GDA logo in men's and women's styles.

Men's polo available in adult sizes: S-XL. \$38. Size 2X-3X. \$40. (Price includes shipping and handling)

Women's polo available in adult sizes: S-XL. \$38. Size 2X-3X. \$40. (Price includes shipping and handling)

# 2013 Holiday Card Winner Announced



GDA Puppy Raiser Lynne Pennala took the winning photo for this year's holiday card contest. Her puppy-in-training "Bentley" will adorn the

cover of our holiday cards that will be available for purchase later this year. Order information will be included in our next newsletter. Thank you to all of you who sent us photos to be considered — it was a tough decision!



**GUIDE DOGS  
OF AMERICA**

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## Open House—Save The Date

HAPPY 65th GDA! — Saturday, June 8

GDA isn't getting older; it's getting better. Come see for yourself and bring your family and friends to "HAPPY 65th GDA!" this year's theme for our annual Open House, which will be held Saturday, June 8. This fun-filled day includes puppy trials, guide dog demos, puppy kissing booth, tours, merchandise, Kids' Korner, delicious food and the ever-popular Silent Auction featuring hundreds of beautiful gift baskets and single items.

Admission to the Open House is free. There is food available for purchase. Gates open at 10:45 a.m. and close at 4 p.m. Events begin at 11 a.m. and end at around 3 p.m. We do ask that you leave your personal pets at home.

## GDA Las Vegas Charity Weekend

Save the Date

Mark your calendars and join us in Las Vegas Nov. 21-23 for the 33rd-annual Charity Banquet & Golf Tournament.



**Partners**

newsletter

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## Congratulations Graduates

Class #376



**Graduates (Puppy Raiser in parentheses):** left to right: Kristi Kovach & Wesley (*The Jewell Family*), Rachele Goeman & Denali (*The Hart Family*), Melissa Barry & Timber (*The Schmid Family*), Kim Flenniken & Porter (*The Rodriguez Family*), David Steinmetz & Heidi (*Ken & Gayle Reizes*), Charlotte Dillon & Jessie (*The Stevens Family*), Tony Connett & Vacchi (*The Pennala Family*), Christy Moon & Smoky (*Jason Shubb*)

**Instructors:** left to right: Linda Hawes, Mindy Romero

**In-home Graduates:**

David Conkling & Potter (*The Jarvis Family*). **Instructor:** Linda Hawes

Cari Shields & Dodger (*Melissa Hyams*). **Instructor:** Steve Burkman

Hayley Edick & Jethro (*Wolf & Jenny Fengler/Matthew & Amy Toussaint*). **Instructor:** Bryan Young

Lila Sanford & Miles (*Chuck & Pat Czuleger*). **Instructor:** Steve Burkman

John Albarran & Julep (*Paul & Cyndi Obest*). **Instructor:** Steve Burkman