



Having A Guide Dog Is Something Special For These Three 20-something Graduates

Being blind was never an obstacle to achieving their goals for recent GDA graduates Adam Ohnstad, Rebecca Mendez and Constantine Greanias. All three were college graduates before they had their guide dogs and already pursuing paths to reach their professional goals and fuel their personal passions. Even though these young adults were independent in many ways, they all knew that having a guide dog would give them greater independence and so much more.

Adam Ohnstad and Hawk



Adam Ohnstad made a lot of big decisions and commitments last year. At the age of 27, Ohnstad got married and received his first guide dog — all in less than two months. Just 21 days after the wedding, he started his 28 days of class at GDA.

Retinitis pigmentosa was the cause of Ohnstad's vision loss and, by age 11, he was legally blind.

"I knew I was at the point that I needed a guide dog but I just wasn't quite ready to admit it and I hadn't done anything to make it happen,"

Ohnstad said. "Then I started thinking ahead a couple of years and what my life would be like and I decided the time

was now. I'm finishing my master's this year and I wanted to be ready for the next chapter. I knew having a guide dog would make that much easier."

The new team graduated in October 2015.

"The day I met Hawk was exciting and nerve-racking at the same time," Ohnstad said. "I knew that I was in charge of his life and well-being. Unlike someone who has had children — this is a completely new experience for me. I realized the responsibility for Hawk falls to me and it became real right there."

Back at home, things returned to normal, and the new guide dog team got into a routine. Although bringing home Hawk to his new wife did not mean "and guide dog makes three"... at least not right way.

"For the first three months that we were home from GDA, it was important that Hawk and I continue bonding, which meant that my wife had to limit her contact with him," Ohnstad explained. "My wife is an animal-lover, so she was happy when she could start interacting more with Hawk."

Since graduation, Hawk has been Ohnstad's officemate and his classmate. Ohnstad has been running a low-income tax clinic on the campus of California State University, Northridge, where he also has been working on an advanced degree. The team will walk across the graduation stage again this May when Ohnstad receives his Master's of Science in taxation.

But it's not all work and no play for the team.

"I like having him out of harness and letting him play and just be a dog, but nothing compares to having him guide me," Ohnstad said. "I started trusting him right away. Without Hawk, I wouldn't walk to school by myself every day and I would be very hesitant to go somewhere new. With him, I don't feel so alone."

Rebecca Mendez and Corra



“Corra is the best thing that has ever happened to me!” said Rebecca Mendez, who graduated with guide dog Corra in January 2015.

Mendez was born blind, but that has not kept her from accomplishing everything that she has put her mind to. The 22-year-old college graduate is a talented musician and singer-songwriter who sang for her GDA classmates during their 28 days in class.

“People had always asked me if I had ever thought about getting a guide

dog. After college, I wanted to be more independent. I was starting to feel like my cane and my blindness were a barrier and felt like something was missing in my life,” Mendez said. “I had a lot of friends but I didn’t like to go out and ask for assistance. I just felt I need to change this and decided it was time to get a guide dog.”

Mendez learned about GDA from her mother’s co-worker, who told her about the program and the person to call at the school for more information.

“Let me tell you, GDA was the first and only place I looked. Something just felt right. I took a tour and could picture myself there,” Mendez said.

In January 2015, three days after arriving at GDA for class, she met Corra for the first time.

“The trainer came into my room with her and there’s this beautiful dog and I’m holding her leash,” Mendez said. “She came right to me and she put her head on my lap from the very start. It was then that I realized Corra was going to need me as much as I needed her”, Mendez said. “When I shared my revelation with my mother, she said, ‘Welcome to parenthood.’ As Corra’s ‘mom,’ I had a responsibility to someone other than myself, and that was a new feeling.”

Mendez said that the first time she took the harness in her hand “it was like magic.”

“I felt normal again. With a cane I felt like I stood out. With a guide dog I stand out but in a different way,” said Mendez. “I’m not hesitant to go and talk to people or ask for assistance. I feel like I can do everything that everyone else can do.”

Mendez is currently finishing a studio album, and Corra is always in the audience.

“I live for music, and Corra knows that. She is a music dog,” said Mendez, whose ambition it is to have a career in music. “I’m a singer and a songwriter. I’m self-taught on the piano and I have written some instrumentals. I also sing in choirs.”

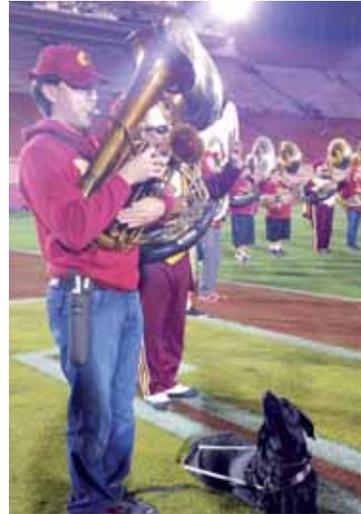
When they are not in the studio, the team enjoys taking walks around the park and doing everyday errands, like going to the bank, shopping and buying things for Corra.

All the things Mendez says she couldn’t do without her guide dog.

They also like to get away to the family vacation home in the local mountains where Corra encountered snow for the first time.

“She loves to play in the snow and roll around it. It makes her so happy and that makes me happy,” Mendez said. “She gives me so much. The continual companionship and unconditional love I get from Corra is so special. I love the bond that we have. I couldn’t be happier.”

Constantine Greanias and Gem



It was exactly one month and nine days following his graduation from the University of Southern California’s Lloyd Greif Center for Entrepreneurial Studies that 22-year-old Constantine Greanias found himself back in class.

Greanias, who has been legally blind since birth, began his 28 days of class at GDA in June 2015. When he met his guide dog Gem for the first time, he knew right away why the trainers had paired the two of them.

“Her energy level, speed, intelligence and ability to learn new things makes Gem the perfect dog for me,” said Greanias, who is always busy doing something — whether it’s working on a new start-up company, playing, composing and producing music, or socializing with friends.

“I was active in college. I was a member of the rowing team and I also played in the band,” Greanias said. “In both cases, I was working in a team or unit and I have enough vision that I was able to do both well and with little assistance or additional direction.”

It was outside of his team activities that Greanias was encountering obstacles that he knew wouldn’t be there if he had a guide dog.

“I had trouble finding doors and I started running into things. I couldn’t find my friends in a crowd,” Greanias said. “With Gem, neither of those things is a problem. I’ll introduce her to a friend and later, when I say to find that person, she makes her way through a crowd of people and takes me to him or her.”

Greanias is an entrepreneur through and through. He has had various businesses for the past nine years. Currently, he is working on two new start-ups: One is a record label, and the other promotes disability in the entertainment industry. Gem is right by his side and ready to take on the next adventure.

“It’s very likely that Gem will inspire a new business or a company,” Greanias said. “I already have an idea that I am going to start research on.” 🐾

Vet's Corner

Spring Is In The Air, And Allergies Are Everywhere



Spring has sprung, and with it comes allergy season — but not all allergies are seasonal. Other common allergies include environmental and food.

Whether talking people or pets, the unpleasant symptoms triggered by allergies are signs of an overactive immune system. The immune system is designed to protect us but when it mistakes non-harmful environmental substances (allergens) as threats, allergic reactions occur.

Common seasonal and environmental allergens that dogs are sensitive to include dust mites; fleas; mold; and pollens from grasses, trees, weeds and flowers. Dogs may also have food allergies or food intolerance to certain ingredients, such as beef, chicken, fish and soy.

Seasonal and Environmental Allergies

Unlike similar allergies in people, these allergies manifest in dogs primarily in the form of skin inflammation and itching. If your dog is excessively scratching, licking or chewing his paws or rubbing his face and ears on the couch or carpet, it could be a sign of allergies.

Skin inflammation can lead to secondary problems such as repeat ear infections; hot spots; superficial bacterial infections; and, sometimes, anal-gland infections.

Signs your dog's ears are giving him problems include scratching at the ears, head shaking and hair loss around the ears. If infection is present, there will often be odor and a discharge from the ears.

Hot spots can develop in dogs, as well. A hot spot is inflamed, infected skin that occurs when your dog's natural bacteria overwhelms an area of his skin. Typically, the skin will be very red and often there is bleeding and hair loss.

Another sign to watch for if you suspect your pet has allergies is generalized redness. Allergic pets often have puffy red eyes, red oral tissue, a red chin, red paws and even a red anus.

While these secondary problems or symptoms are often what gets noticed and can usually be cleared up with appropriate treatment, they tend to recur if the underlying allergic issue(s) are not addressed by a visit to your veterinarian.

Food Allergies

Dogs can also have food allergies. Some of the symptoms can be similar to those caused by seasonal allergies, like itchy skin and chronic ear infections but gastrointestinal problems — like excessive gas, diarrhea and vomiting — can also signal a food allergy.

To isolate the foods to which your dog is reacting, your veterinarian will likely put your dog on an elimination diet to identify the problem food or foods. It's important to note that food allergies may show up in dogs at any age.

Allergies should be treated seriously, as allergic reactions can range from discomfort to life-threatening. To get your dog the relief, proper care and treatment he needs, always consult your veterinarian.

Congratulations Graduates

Class #392



Graduates (Puppy Raiser in parentheses): Left to right: Richard Guzman and Wizard (*Joe and Melissa Stayton*); Robert Willmon and Easton (*The Norris Family*); Guillermo Robles and Monty (*The Carlson Family*); Harold Johnson and Abner (*Judi Gomez & Miguel Ola and The Jarvis Family*); Pam Metz and Gatsby (*Diana Janke*); Frank Kircher and Galaxy (*Jim and Bridget Winnett*); Adam Perez and Murphy (*Paige Jarquin and Diane Young*); Bee Yang and Giselle (*Andrew Chesis*); Ray Wilder and Gage (*Kathy Connell*); Tom Olzak and Goliath (*The Meno Family*)

Instructors: Left to right: Alejandra Maldonado, Melinda Romero, Linda Hawes, Sean Chiles

In-home Graduate:
Janet Perry and Doc (*David and Rebecca Smith*)

Instructor: Steve Burkman

Donor Spotlight: In Loving Memory

Daughter designates GDA in her inheritance



Lester Schneck was a member of the IAM for more than 50 years. According to his daughter Claire, he was proud to be a part of the organization that founded Guide Dogs of America. Through the years, as he read the union's newsletter, he would comment to her about the fundraising events the local unions held to benefit GDA.

When her father passed away in 2012 at the age of 96, Schneck inherited his estate. As an only child and without any children of her own, Schneck wanted to honor her father's memory and began to think about what was most important to him. It was eyesight.

In his later years, Schneck's father developed macular degeneration. While her father never lost his vision completely, he knew that it was a real possibility that he could wake up one morning and it would be gone. In addition to what he learned about GDA through his affiliation with the union, Schneck's father saw, firsthand, the difference a guide dog makes in the life of someone

who is blind. At church, Schneck and her father saw a married couple, both of whom had guide dogs, and met many people who had guide dogs at meetings for those with vision loss. Father and daughter came to learn how much these people relied on their guide dogs. They would tell the Schnecks that they would be lost without their dogs.

"My father never had to get a guide dog but I know that had his vision deteriorated to a point that he could no longer get around on his own he definitely would have wanted one," Schneck said. "Not only had he seen how these dogs helped their partners but he was a lifelong dog lover who would have enjoyed the companionship that comes from having a guide dog.

"I thought about the charities that I would want to benefit from my father's estate, and GDA came to mind. I contacted the school and asked what I needed to do to designate GDA in my will and I became a Partner in Trust."

Schneck shares information about GDA with her friends, sending articles from the newsletter that she feels they would be interested in.

"I especially like the articles about the graduates and learning about the difference the dogs have made in their lives," said Schneck. "If my dad would have gone blind, he wouldn't have gone out and done anything but if he would have had a guide dog that could have been much different."

For information about becoming a Partner in Trust, please contact Rhonda Bissell at (818) 833-6432.

Graduates Gain Confidence... And A New Best Friend

In addition to giving our graduates independence and mobility, our guide dogs also give their partners' confidence. We asked our graduates: What have you had the confidence to do since receiving your guide dog that you may have not done prior to receiving him/her? Many of their responses appear here.

I lost my sight more than four years ago and stopped working. Now, with Henna at my side, I am working full time in the ministry. I can't imagine having the confidence to do this without her.

— Terri Klein

Maisy's ability to find her way through deep drifts of snow, which has enabled me to carry on with shopping and other daily tasks and fun things even in the dead of winter — something I couldn't do with a cane.

— Sharlene Wills

With Tucker, I've been able to start hiking again, one of my favorite activities. We're not going to break any speed records but we're outdoors, enjoying nature and blowing the socks off of other hikers who see us trekking the trails!

— Karl Mundstock

I am so much healthier because, with Sadie, I can walk a 25-minute mile and we average about four miles a day. She has also taught me that we can get through airports and train stations together without my husband, when necessary. This freedom is wonderful!

— Donna Reed Matthews

With Alvin, I have the confidence to travel alone or to move any place in this country and know that I'll feel secure there with my dog. I also visit people and places in unfamiliar parts of my own city just for fun and know that my dog will remember the route next time!

— Elizabeth René

Having a guide dog has given me the confidence to travel alone to different states and countries — something I would have never done by myself with a cane.

— Cari Shields

I'm a lot more confident walking through open areas with my dog than I ever was with my cane. Also, I can actually carry on conversations while walking without having to worry about getting around obstacles, as my guide dog takes me right around them. She's changed my life for the better in so many ways.

— Lauren Adams



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OF AMERICA**

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LOS ANGELES, CA
PERMIT NO. 2181

Save The Date

GDA Las Vegas Charity Event —
Nov. 17-19

Mark your calendars for the annual Las Vegas Charity weekend Nov. 17-19. The weekend will kick off on Thursday, Nov. 17, with the Hawgs for Dogs ride and the sporting clay event. Friday morning, foursomes will tee off at Revere Golf Club in Henderson. The weekend will conclude on Saturday evening with the 36th-annual William W. Wimpisinger Charity Banquet at The Paris Casino & Hotel. Invitations will be mailed early this summer, and details posted on the GDA website.

Construction Update



As construction of the new GDA visitor and education center continues on our campus, we are pleased to announce that naming opportunities are available for areas of the building. Learn more about how your generous support can benefit our program by visiting the homepage of our website: **guidedogsofamerica.org**. This new addition to our campus will allow us to enhance our visitors' experience by being able to give them a more in-depth look into GDA, its history and its programs.

Naming opportunities are available for portions of the project:

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| Flag Pole — \$25,000 NAMED | Apartment — \$100,000 |
| Board Room — \$50,000 NAMED | Lobby — \$150,000 |
| Courtyard — \$100,000 NAMED | Large Meeting Space — \$250,000 |

For more information about other naming opportunities and sponsorship levels, contact Rhonda Bissell at (818) 833-6432.

Online Bidding For Great Goods To Benefit GDA

Bidding on items in GDA's ever-popular annual Silent Auction is now easier than ever with our new, bigger and better online auction. Logon to GDA's Bidding for Good auction (**biddingforgood.com/guidedogsofamerica**) from your computer, smartphone or tablet and let the bidding begin. Choose from an array of items, including travel, sporting events, dining and many other fun activities and items. The site will be open for bids from June 2-12 only. Reminder: This year there will be no OPEN HOUSE due to construction.

Mission Statement

Guide Dogs of America is dedicated to its mission to provide guide dogs and instruction in their use, free of charge, to blind and visually impaired men and women from the United States and Canada so that they may continue to pursue their goals with increased mobility and independence.