

Summer 2016 volume 31 number 3

How GDA's Instructors Prepare for Class

From personality to pace, new students to retrainees, young adults to seniors, there's a lot that goes into preparing for a class of 10 students and 10 dogs

Students arrive at GDA four to five times a year for 28 days of class to learn to work with and care for their new guide dog partners, but it takes GDA's guide dog instructors months to prepare for the arrival of each class.



"About a month before class, we do our final testing with the dogs. We work them indoors and outdoors, in busy malls, high-traffic areas and neighborhoods — situations we know they will encounter when they are working with their partners," said Jamie Vierzicke, one of GDA's licensed instructors. "We work blindfolded with each dog. We have absolutely no vision and, like the students, we have to rely solely on the dog to guide us safely."

This final testing determines which dogs are ready to be matched with the next incoming class. While there are only 10 students in each class, the instructors have a field of 30 or so dogs from which to choose the perfect matches. Every dog will have had between six months and a year of formal training with the instructors who train, work and track the progress of each dog. Then it's time to learn about the students who will be in the class and start the process of matching each with a guide dog.

"We read over the individual student files, which gives us valuable information that we'll consider to help us determine the best dog for each individual," Vierzicke said. "All incoming students already have had an in-home interview with one of the instructors or sent in a video. In the students' file, we learn about where they live, what they do on a daily basis, how busy and active they are, how fast they walk, if there are other people and/or pets in the household. We usually have two, sometimes three, dogs in mind per student, but the final decision isn't made until class starts."

The week before class final preparations are made for the students' arrival. Each student's name is posted in braille on the door of his or her assigned room. And a few new "furnishings" are brought in for the dogs, including a crate, dog bed and bowls for food and water. Dogs that are potentially going to be in class are brought up to the dorm building to expose them to the new environment they will be living in. And, each student receives a call from one of the three instructors who will work with the class during their 28 days of training.

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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.

"We call them to see if they have any last-minute questions and to give them reminders of what to bring. One of the most important items — comfortable shoes," Viezbicke said. "We do a lot of walking during training. Up to five miles a day."

Graduate services has taken care of travel arrangements for students who are coming from long distances but it is the instructors who meet the students at the airport and take them to what will be their "home" for the next four weeks. Students always arrive on a Sunday but they don't get their dogs until a couple of days later, this is known as "dog day."

"For us, class starts the minute we pick up the students from the airport and/or meet the local students at GDA," Viezbicke said. "Upon arrival at the school, students receive an orientation of the dorm building and their room."

After everyone is settled, it's time for dinner and the students and instructors gather in the dining room. Class is now officially in session.

"Those first few days we learn more about each students' mobility, pace, and pull needed from a dog with 'Juno' work — this is when an instructor will wear an adapted harness and lead the student. It tells a lot about the student and helps the instructors to finalize the match.

"We also are getting to know the students beyond their files," Viezbicke said. "We learn a little about their personality, which is important, because our dogs also have their own personalities. When we're deciding between a couple of dogs for a student, sometimes you get a gut feeling and it's usually because they have complementary personalities." It is important at GDA that not only the dogs match the student, but that each dog will be matched with a person that they will be happy with as well. That is a large part of what makes a team successful.

How the instructors prepare for each new class doesn't change much from class to class, but every class is very different.

"You do as much as you can to prepare ahead of time but some things just have to be worked out after the students arrive," Viezbicke said. "When you have a class with one student in their 20s and another in their 80s, it's likely that we're going to make some modifications to accommodate the different needs of each student. Typically, we'll have a mix of first-time students and returning students and a range of ages; the summer class tends to have mostly younger students, as they are out of school for the summer."

Another variable the instructors have to consider is the weather, as summer in Sylmar can be quite hot, requiring additional preparation and planning.

"The June/July class is the most challenging. Typically, the dogs that are potential matches for students in the summer class already have been introduced to wearing booties that protect their feet," Viezbicke said. "When the temperatures are too hot, in addition to breaking up the routes so we are working during the coolest parts of the day, we'll begin working indoor areas, like malls, earlier in the training."

For Viezbicke and her fellow instructors, every class is special, every student is special and every guide dog team is special.

"The favorite part of my job is seeing people come in and watching them change over the course of class," Viezbicke said. "We have students who come in that have never had a dog so seeing that relationship develop is always great. Or having an 83-year-old man come in for his first guide dog. It touches your heart."

Meet Fran the Feline

GDA's 'feline introduction tech' joins the nursery



No, this friendly feline is not a kitten that's lost her way; she's a kitty that's found a very important job. Meet Fran, GDA's newest "employee" serving in the newly created position of "feline introduction tech."

In the Winter 2016 issue of *Partners*,

we shared details about the enhanced puppy development program in our nursery. Through this program, the puppies are exposed to new experiences in two specially created outdoor play areas and through many other activities designed to build their confidence and comfort in new environments. Fran is a part of that program.

Her job is to socialize with the young puppies and introduce them to the sight, smell and movement of cats. She also has other responsibilities (and talents), which include keeping the breeding dogs that are boarding at GDA company and insect abatement.

If you missed the article about the new puppy enrichment program or would like to read it again, visit the GDA website (www.guidedogsofamerica.org). Scroll down the homepage, on the right side you will see a "Newsletter" icon; click the icon to access the *Partners* archive.



Vet's Corner

Summer Safety for Summer Fun with Your Dog



If you want to keep the “fun” in summer fun, refer to these seasonal safety tips to help you and your dog make the most of the longer, lazier days and avoid trips to the veterinarian.

Take Care in the Car

This tip is so important that it has to be the first on the list. You may think leaving your dog in the car for a few minutes is no big deal but it can quickly lead to heat stroke. In bright sunshine, your car acts like an oven, becoming much hotter inside than the outside air. In fact, on a sunny 70-degree day, your car can heat up to more than 100 degrees within minutes. It's best to be safe and leave your dog at home during shopping trips.

Pool Precautions

If your dog appears eager to swim, teach him how to get out of the pool safely by using the steps. Practice with him 5 to 10 times in a row to help him to learn where the steps are, that way — whether he's swimming or accidentally falls in — he will know how to get out. Never leave your dog unattended in the pool.

Chlorine can irritate a dog's skin and upset his stomach. Rinse your dog with fresh water after swimming in a pool. Always thoroughly dry your dog's ear to avoid swimmer's ear, which can lead to ear infection. Do not let him drink the pool water, as the chlorine can cause stomach upset.

Hot Foot

Sidewalk, patio, street, sand and other surfaces can burn your dog's footpads. Walk your dog in the morning and at night when outdoor surfaces are coolest. Press your hand onto a surface for 30 seconds to test the surface before allowing your dog to walk on it. If it is painful for you, it will be painful for your dog.

Water, Water Everywhere

Prevent dehydration by providing your dog with unrestricted access to fresh and cool water both indoors and outdoors. Ice cubes and frozen cubes of chicken or beef broth encourage your dog to take in more fluids and help keep him cool.

Bug Off

Ticks, fleas, mosquitoes, flies and other insects are at their peak during the summer months. Talk to your veterinarian about appropriate protection for your dog.

Buzz Off

Stings and bites can cause severe reactions. If there is major swelling or the dog seems disoriented, sick or has trouble moving or breathing, go to the vet immediately. Even if your pet seems fine, watch him carefully for 24 hours.

Keep Off the Grass

Many lawns are treated with fertilizers and pesticides during the summer. Keep your dog safe this summer by keeping him off lawns and unknown grassy areas.

Stay Away from the grr-ill

Food that is stuck to the barbecue after cooking can tempt your dog to lick the barbecue and burn his tongue or mouth. Lighter fluid is a poison and should not be left where your dog can reach it.

Party Animals

When it comes to a backyard barbecue or party, remember that the food and drink offered to guests may be poisonous to dogs. Keep alcoholic beverages away from pets, as they can cause intoxication, depression and comas. The snacks enjoyed by your human friends should not be a treat for your pet; any change of diet, even for one meal, may give your dog digestive problems. Foods to especially avoid include raisins, grapes, onions, chocolate and products with the sweetener xylitol.

Keep the summer party going by following these tips and remember to always consult your vet if you have questions about summertime activities and the safety for your dog.

Giving A Shout Out To GDA's Online Silent Auction

We would like to thank all those involved in making GDA's Online Silent Auction a huge success. From the hard-working, dedicated volunteers who put it all together, to the many supporters who generously donated auction items, to the hundreds of bidders. Their contributions to the online event helped us to raise nearly \$40,000 for the school and its programs.

Donor Spotlight

A Trip to GDA Took This Partner in Trust on a Trip Down Memory Lane



The retirement community where Ms. Blair Brignall is a resident was offering a trip to Guide Dogs of America to visit the school and learn about the program and, of course, see the dogs.

Brignall loves dogs, especially Labrador Retrievers. Seeing the dogs at the school brought back fond memories of her beloved dog and the

National Field Champion Labrador Retrievers that her father-in-law had raised.

“You take one look at the faces of the dogs at GDA and you can see just how intelligent they are,” Brignall said. “They are just wonderful dogs and they do so much to help their blind partners.”

This is something she has seen first-hand on many occasions since making her trip to the school.

“After my visit to GDA, I noticed a gentleman in my community with a guide dog. I asked him about his dog and he told me that they had graduated from Guide Dogs of America,” Brignall said. “Many times, I would ride the bus with them. The man knew I was a dog lover and always let his dog give me a big kiss. I would watch them work together in our community, and it really inspired me to want to do something for people like my neighbor to receive a guide dog. I contacted GDA and that’s when I learned about becoming a Partner in Trust and designated a gift to the school.”

Brignall has been a Partner in Trust since 2010 and proudly tells her friends about her decision to designate GDA in her trust and would encourage others to do the same.

“I spread the word about GDA and the wonderful work the school does for so many people like my neighbor, whose guide dog gives him such great freedom and independence,” Brignall said.

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

Partners in Trust



Make your gift to Guide Dogs of America last a lifetime and beyond. The Partners in Trust Society was established by GDA as a way to recognize and honor the generosity of those who have included the school in their planned giving. Providing life income gifts and bequests lets your gift continue working beyond your lifetime to help others achieve their goals with increased mobility and

independence through a partnership with a loyal and loving guide dog. Charitable organizations are not subject to gift or estate taxes so your gift continues to support the causes close to your heart, like Guide Dogs of America, without being diminished by the IRS.

You will receive our special “Partners In Trust” crystal jar as a way of thanking you that you can display proudly, knowing the difference you are making in the lives of others through supporting Guide Dogs of America. Please call Rhonda Bissell at (818) 833-6432 for more information.

Congratulations Graduates

Class #393



Graduates (Puppy Raiser in parentheses): Front Row from left to right: Alison Miller and Kelso (*Cindy Valancius*); James Nishimura and Sonny (*The Moran Family*); Jack Byers and Padmay (*The Allenby Family*); Wayne Aiken and Stella (*Andy and Liisa Primack*); Justin Bertrand and Sooner (*Alan and Cindi Bleemers*); Debbie Shane and Fargo (*The Davenport Family*); Troy Leeberg and Niklaus (*The Heaner Family*); Alyssa Hicks and Gabby (*The Corbin Family*); Sonja Wolf and Bria (*Nancy Hawthorne and Roy Nitschke*)

Instructors: Back Row from left to right: Jamie Viezbicke, Sean Chiles, Caitlin Smith

In Memory

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

Ava — In home
Bella — Class 350
Breezy — Class 338

Dusty — Class 336
Loman — Class 367

2016 Raffles

To purchase raffle tickets, use the order form on this page or call GDA at (818) 833-6429.



GDA Bike Raffle

This year, the GDA motorcycle raffle is for a custom 2016 Harley-Davidson Road Glide, two-tone red. The winning ticket will be drawn on Nov. 19, 2016 at the Guide Dogs of America Annual Banquet in Las Vegas. (Winner need not be present.) Visit the GDA website (guidedogsofamerica.org) for additional details and photos. Tickets are \$5 each or five tickets for \$20.

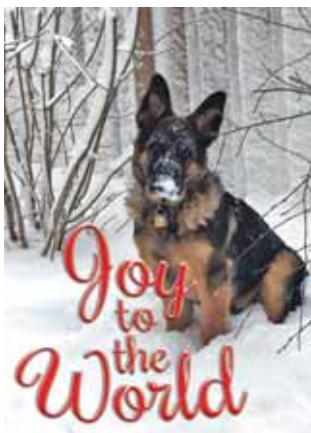
Quilt Raffle



This year's colorful quilt was created and donated by the Orange County Quilters Guild, which named the quilt "Woof, Woof." Several of the blocks feature a Labrador Retriever design, some of which even include the recognizable yellow jacket that identifies a GDA puppy-in-training. Dotting

the quilt are smaller squares with paw prints and hearts. The quilt measures 65" x 85".

Purchase tickets using the order form on this page and mail it to GDA postmarked by Dec. 1, 2016. Tickets are \$2 each or six for \$10. Drawing to be held on Dec. 10, 2016 at the GDA December puppy raiser holiday party. Winner does not need to be present.



6th-Annual Holiday Card

GDA 2016 Holiday Photo Card Contest Winner!

We are happy to reveal the winning photo for the 2016 holiday card. This photo of puppy-in-training Linus was taken by his raiser Cindy Valancius. It was a "ruff" decision, as we received so many great photos to choose from. Thank you to all of you who sent in submissions.

Holiday card outside message: "Joy to the World." Inside message: "May you be blessed and merry now and throughout the New Year!" Cards measure 5" x 7" and are bundled 15 cards (with envelopes) to a pack. Price: \$18 per pack, INCLUDES SHIPPING AND HANDLING. The cards can be purchased on our website (www.guidedogsofamerica.org), by using the order form in this newsletter or at GDA. Questions? Call (818) 833-6429

Give Monthly, Give Mobility

Guide Dogs of America prides itself in giving the gift of guide dogs at no charge to blind and visually impaired individuals in the U.S. and Canada. With your monthly donation you can help us reach our goal of supplying the gift of mobility to at least 50 people each year. GDA receives no government funding and relies solely on donations from companies, organizations and individuals such as you. Your monthly gift will go toward the breeding, raising and training of our dogs, along with the instruction that each blind recipient needs in order to comprise a successful team. This method of payment ensures reliable, consistent income for our organization and, because the donation is made electronically, it is more cost effective for the school. By giving monthly, you are giving mobility to those who need it. Please visit our website at guidedogsofamerica.org, click on **How to Help**, and then **Recurring Donations**. If you have any questions, please call (818) 362-5834.

SUMMER 2016 Order Form

*Questions? Call (818) 833-6429. *All Shipping & Handling is included**

Mail this entire form with your payment.

Raffle Tickets

<input type="checkbox"/> 2016 GDA Bike Raffle — \$5 per ticket or \$20 for 5	\$
<input type="checkbox"/> 2016 Quilt Raffle — \$2 per ticket or \$10 for 6	\$

Holiday Cards — \$18 per pack (includes shipping & handling)

<input type="checkbox"/> 2016 Holiday Cards	\$
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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: *Summer Merchandise Order Form*, 13445 Glenoaks Blvd., Sylmar, CA 91342 **Or use the enclosed envelope.**



Partners newsletter

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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 Haws 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 (www.guidedogsofamerica.org).



Construction Update

By the time you read this newsletter, we have neared completion on the new GDA Visitor and Education Center. A building dedication is scheduled for early fall. You can find the most recent updates on our website.

This new building will allow us to enhance our visitors' experience by being able to give them a more in-depth look into GDA's history and programs. Several naming opportunities are still available for areas of the building. Learn more about how your donation can support this exciting new addition to the GDA campus by visiting our website at guidedogsofamerica.org.

Naming opportunities are available for portions of the project:

Naming opportunities include:

GDA Store — \$10,000

Audio/Visual Display — \$10,000

GDA History Wall — \$15,000

Break Room — \$25,000

Serving Room — \$25,000

Flag Pole — ~~\$25,000~~ **NAMED**

Board Room — ~~\$50,000~~ **NAMED**

Courtyard — ~~\$100,000~~ **NAMED**

Apartment — \$100,000

Lobby — \$150,000

Large Meeting Space — \$250,000

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