



From Homeless to Working on Capitol Hill

LAUREL HILBERT IS LIVING THE AMERICAN DREAM WITH HIS GUIDE DOG BY HIS SIDE

When Laurel Hilbert (pictured above left with Aero), who has been blind since birth, made up his mind that his next step in life was to move to the United States, his friends and family were skeptical. He had no contacts, spoke no English and had no money. A daunting start to what has turned out to be an extraordinary journey.

Hilbert's determination and resolve to get an education and change his life have led him from Syria to Los Angeles to New York to San Francisco and now to Washington, D.C.; and, from walking with a stick that was often broken by people stepping on it to learning to use a cane in mobility training to receiving his first guide dog from Guide Dogs of America. Since arriving in the U.S. in 2013, Hilbert has gone from being homeless to working on Capitol Hill as a legislative intern for California Senator Dianne Feinstein.

Once settled in Los Angeles, Hilbert enrolled in high school and started working with a mobility instructor to help him better navigate his new city. It was this instructor who suggested he consider getting a guide dog and told him about Guide Dogs of America. There was just one hitch, he was afraid of dogs. His instructor convinced Hilbert to "at least" take a tour of the

school. With much resistance, Hilbert finally agreed under the condition that he would not have to interact with any of the dogs. He left having not only petted the dog but being led (with an guide dog instructor next to him) by a guide dog in harness. "It was exhilarating, but I still wasn't sure about

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A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It is with pride and great pleasure that I share with you all that Guide Dogs of America is accomplishing this year.

We continue to achieve a four-star rating with Charity Navigator, the Platinum Level seal of Transparency with Guide Star and we received glowing reviews from the International Guide Dog Foundation during our biannual review. We have also been busy with fundraising with over one hundred events across the country.

In addition, we also are continuing to make improvements throughout our campus. Following the completion of the student dormitory renovation project in March, we have invested in a new back-up generator to ensure our campus is covered in the event of a power outage. We also installed new commercial washers and dryers, a sink, and dishwasher for our puppy nursery, and landscape improvements are being made throughout the campus.

With the heat of summer, classes were on hiatus, but our Fall class is in session and additional classes are scheduled for this year.

I want to thank the staff, puppy raisers, alumni, volunteers, and generous donors for supporting the mission of Guide Dogs of America. All of you – in countless ways – make the work we do possible.

—Russell Gittlen, President



Russell Gittlen, President,
Guide Dogs of America



Hilbert and Aero with Senator Feinstein

FROM HOMELESSNESS TO WORKING ON CAPITOL HILL
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actually having a guide dog,” said Hilbert.

Three years and a move to New York City later, Hilbert felt settled enough in his life and work to apply to GDA. With the support of his employer to take the three weeks off he needed to spend at GDA, in January 2016 he joined and graduated from class 396.

“When the trainer brought Aero to my room, I remember feeling a little confused and a little afraid because I still didn’t have experience being around dogs,” explained Hilbert. “The three weeks of training was intensive and emotional. There were times it was all going well and there were other times that I felt frustrated and had difficulties. The trainers understood all of my emotions. We would have one-on-one conversations to talk through how I was feeling. They were incredible.”

After graduation, Hilbert and Aero returned to New York and set about learning how to live and work together.

“I knew Aero was keeping me safe on the busy Manhattan streets, but I didn’t know the extent until I was walking with a friend who started to point out obstacles ahead of Aero and me,” said Hilbert. “When you use a cane, you have to be 100 percent alert. There are days where you have barely made it through – it’s cold, it’s hot, you’re distracted, it was a long day – but you have to be focused.

With Aero, I still have to be alert, but I know I can count on him. He is an exceptional dog and I am so grateful to GDA for this amazing gift they have given me.”

The team had been back in New York for a while, when Hilbert decided to make a move back to the West Coast to San Francisco to attend college. At first, he worked remotely for the company he had been with in New York, but scheduling conflicts made it difficult to continue.

Once again, he found himself in an unstable financial situation and facing homelessness. He had a chance meeting with a local politician and longtime advocate for San Francisco’s homeless population, who worked with an agency for homeless youth, and secured a place for Hilbert to live for up to two years.

As a way to pay forward this kindness and hoping to help other youth who, like him, have experienced the insecurity of homelessness and living in shelters, Hilbert founded a nonprofit. Through his organization, Hilbert’s mission is to “promote the dignity of individuals who are not respected or are humiliated” due to their homelessness.

Hilbert, who always has had political aspirations, turned to his politician friend for help in securing an internship in Washington, DC. His friend, who now sits on the board of Hilbert’s nonprofit, secured several introductions for him. Hilbert wasted no time reaching out and scheduling interviews. His third interview was with the office of Senator Feinstein and it proved to be the charm. Within a few hours of the meeting, Hilbert was offered the internship.

Senator Feinstein, whom Hilbert had the opportunity to speak to at her birthday celebration, took great interest in both Hilbert and Aero. Hilbert shared with her his story, including how he had come to be an intern in her office and his future political goals.

“She asked me questions about my life and then asked to know more about Aero and his training,” said Hilbert, “I was very proud to explain that he came from Guide Dogs of America and what is involved with the training, and how they go about matching the dogs to the students to create a team like Aero and me. Since that day she has invited me to many more meetings, and she stops by to say hello to Aero every morning.”

Hilbert is now 23 years old and his ten-year plan is to run for Senate when he is 33 years old. He and Aero already are forging a path toward reaching that goal. 🐾



GDA Alumni Respond to “How Has a Guide Dog Changed Your Life?”

HAVING A GUIDE DOG BY THEIR SIDES IS LIFE CHANGING FOR OUR ALUMNI. Whether it’s newfound freedom to explore their world, greater confidence in trying new experiences, having a reliable companion when going out or just staying in, or finding a new “co-worker,” our alumni all agree life is different... better, fuller. But how exactly? We asked our alumni, “How has living with a guide dog changed your life?”

For Adam Bailey, having guide dog Mica has given him much more than independence, mobility and companionship. She has proven herself so valuable in helping him at his job that Mica now has an official employee badge, effectively making her Bailey’s co-worker.

Bailey, a purchasing manager at an aerospace company, suffers from Usher Syndrome — a condition where vision

loss is one of the complications. His position often requires that he goes to various locations throughout the facility including the factory floor. This area presents unique challenges due to equipment, including forklifts moving material daily around the shop floor.

“Before Mica, I used a white cane to navigate the facility. Moving objects were difficult for me to anticipate so I hesitated to do things if I knew there was traffic. I didn’t know when hazards were coming.

“To further complicate things, I couldn’t just memorize a route because things continually change. One day there may be a pallet of aluminum, but the next day it’s gone,” Bailey explained. “With Mica, I can more effectively do all aspects of my job, including being on the factory floor.”

Having Mica has been life changing for Bailey.

“Mica has made an incredible impact on me and my family. They see, and I experience, the freedom she gives me. She keeps me safe in all my travels and I have so much confidence knowing that she will guide me safely,” Bailey said. 🐾

IN LOVING MEMORY

With sadness, we note the passing of the following guide dogs. Along with their partners, we thank them for their years of dedicated service and companionship:

- **Eden**, Class 361
- **Moby**, Class 367.5
- **Frasier**, Class 356
- **Morris**, Class 355.5
- **Hawk**, Class 351
- **Shuli**, Class 390

QUOTES FROM OUR GRADUATES

"My guide dog has opened doors of opportunity. She is an ambassador and educator to all. She makes my life freer and allows me the ability to do what I want to do when I need to do it. She is my eyes, my safety, and my strength."

—Beverly Hammett

"Willis is my very first guide dog and he has changed my life in so many ways. Most significantly, since having Willis, I no longer hesitate about going out or getting around at night. He has given me confidence and independence."

—Dina Hakim

"I get out more on my own with Coral. No matter the challenge, she will help me. I have more confidence and her unconditional love gets me through the day. And, I never have to look for a date!"

—Theresa Marchetti

"Gem has changed how I go about my life. I moved to a city with no friends or family, with full confidence that she would take care of me in our new home. She allows me to confidently go places that I have never been and know that I will get to where I need to be safely."

—Constantine Greanias

GRADUATES



Class 411

Hesper Lovejoy and Kiwi (Susan Hoffman), Therese (Kitty) Clark and Java (Susan Ellis), graduate and Loki (Tammy and Mark New), Desiree Coleman and Hydra (Bridget and Jim Winnett), Debra Ratliff and Marty (Marshall Shrago), Erin Goodwin-Allen and Calypso (Dave and Mary Brown), Adam Bailey and Mica (Allen and Beverly Adams), Antonio Fotualii and Ted (Hanna Habegger and Family)

INSTRUCTORS: Alejandra Maldonado, Sean Chiles, Tiffany Brundy



Donor Spotlight

HER 'PARTNERSHIP' WAS INSPIRED BY EARLY LESSONS

Janice Baxter was a very young girl when she learned about Guide Dogs of America. When she was out with her mom, they would frequently see a blind person with his guide dog who lived in the community. She thought how fortunate he was to have a guide dog.

As soon as she joined the work force, Baxter started to make regular contributions to GDA.

"It wasn't much when I first started working, "but as the years went on, and without a family of my own, I started to contribute more to make a difference while I was still alive," Baxter said. About 15 years ago, I did a living will and became a Partner in Trust to ensure Guide Dogs of America would continue to receive a contribution from me, past my lifetime. I am so happy with my decision."

Baxter said that she still gets tears of joy in her eyes when she sees a blind or visually impaired person with their guide dog.

"GDA does such amazing work," she said. "So many of us take our sight for granted. There is so much need for help in this world, and if I can contribute and possibly inspire others to do the same, well, that is just wonderful."

Gifts to our endowment will continue to support our mission. If you would like information about becoming a Partner in Trust, please contact Rhonda Bissell at (818) 833-6432. 🐾



Merchandise

SHOP GDA

Check out new and popular merchandise from Shop GDA! <https://guidedogsofamerica.vendecommerce.com/>. To purchase, go to guidedogsofamerica.org, then click on Shop GDA! Or you can call (818) 362-5834 or GDA's retail store.



HOLIDAY CARDS

Two designs, available in packs of 10 cards with 10 envelopes. Interior message, "Wishing you a Golden Holiday Season and Peace and Joy in the New Year!"

PRICE: \$10.00*

HOLIDAY ORNAMENT

This adorable golden retriever round glass ornament (3" diameter), will be a cherished ornament for years to come.

PRICE: \$15.00*

ANYTHING IS PAWSIBLE!

Women's Pink or Blue-Gray, long sleeve, hooded t-shirt. GDA logo on front left. Polyester/Cotton/Rayon. Graphic on Back: Together, Anything is Pawsible.

PRICE: \$25.00*

LAPTOP BRIEFCASE

Laptop Briefcase, measures 16" X 12" X 3-1/2", navy 600D polyester nylon material, interior padded divider, multiple pockets, adjustable shoulder strap, 1 color imprint.

PRICE: \$40.00*

*Tax, shipping and handling not included



LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY

Several naming opportunities are currently available for the newly renovated Student Dormitory. This is a truly unique and special way to support our programs and memorialize your commitment to our mission.

A prominent donor recognition plaque will be placed outside the area you select to name.

Contact Lisa Peterson at (818) 833-6429 if you are interested in being a part of this important project or go to guidedogsofamerica.org/ways-to-give/dorm-naming-opportunities

Thank you for your support.

BUILDING:	NAMED	\$300,000
STUDENT LOBBY:		\$125,000
STUDENT DINING HALL:		\$100,000
STUDENT LEARNING CENTER:		\$75,000
KITCHEN:		\$50,000
STUDENT OUTDOOR LOUNGE:		\$35,000
DORMITORY ROOMS:		\$25,000
<i>(15 12 remaining naming opportunities)</i>		
TRAINER OFFICE:	NAMED	\$20,000
ENTRANCE AWNING:	NAMED	\$10,000
DORM LAUNDRY ROOM:		\$5,000
DORM ROOM PATIO:		\$5,000
<i>(14 11 remaining naming opportunities)</i>		

Gifts in the amounts listed below will be acknowledged on the renovated dorm's dedicated *Donor Recognition Garden Sculpture*:

- **LEADERS** \$3,000 up to \$5,000
- **PARTNERS** \$1,000 up to \$2,999
- **FRIENDS** \$500 up to \$999



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GET PARTNERS DIGITALLY!

If you would like to receive Guide Dogs of America's "Partners" newsletter in your email inbox rather than your home mailbox, let us know. It will save more than trees; it will save printing costs and postage so even more of every dollar donated can go to our program.

Simply go to www.guidedogsofamerica.org and click on the "Partners" icon, located on the right side of homepage. Fill out the form with your email address and mailing address so we can remove you from the postage newsletter list.

SAVE THE DATE – LAS VEGAS CHARITY WEEKEND

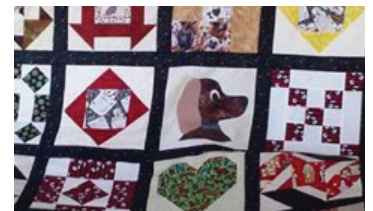
Mark your calendars for the 39th annual Guide Dogs of America Las Vegas Charity weekend, Nov. 21-23, 2019, to be held at Bally's Las Vegas Hotel & Casino. This year's theme is "Woofstock," so get in the groove, grab your tie-dye or favorite rock band t-shirt, bell bottoms and beads!



For more information and to register, go to <http://www.guidedogsofamerica.org/event/>

2019 QUILT RAFFLE

This year's quilt, "Dogs Want to Party Too!" was made and donated by the Santa Clarita Quilters Guild. The quilt measures 108" x 120." If you would like to purchase raffle tickets they are \$2 each, or 6 for \$10. Send your check to Guide Dogs of America, postmarked by Nov. 29, 2019, or call us at (818) 833-6429. Make sure to include a return address. The drawing will be held at the GDA puppy raiser holiday party. Winner does not need to be present. 🐾



MISSION STATEMENT: Guide Dogs of America empowers people who are blind and visually impaired to live with increased independence, confidence and mobility by providing expertly matched guide dog partners.