



Summer 2020

"Andrew Delaney Apprentice Program" Apprentice's First Team = SUCCESS!

Through the Eyes of an Apprentice, Class with Guide Dog Everest

As I sat for my interview for the apprentice Guide Dog Mobility Instructor position at Guide Dogs of Texas I will never forget Jamie Massey saying, "Give me just a few minutes and I'll go get Everest." Those words and the walk that followed after with Everest led me to completely change my career, which has completely changed my life in the best way possible.

Fast forward and I found myself saying those very same words to the client we matched Everest to, during their matching visit. I remember walking away from that visit feeling overjoyed and full of love. Not only did I believe Everest and his client were a perfect match, but I was so excited for him to start working for her and give her the guided sight she's been waiting for and he's been preparing his whole life for.

The night before Everest's class felt like Christmas Eve, I couldn't wait for the next chapter of his journey to begin and I was excited to see how this last piece of the puzzle would fit. Every day his client progressed more and more and they started working together as a team and in no time I could see their trust building. It felt incredible to watch all the hard work Everest put in during advanced training come to fruition in class with his client as they learned and began mastering their guiding skills together in the coming weeks.

Training Everest was an honor and being able to watch him work with his client brings the biggest smile to my face. He is so proud to be called a Guide Dog and it definitely shows any time he is working. I can't wait to continue watching his bond and relationship with his client grow in the coming years and am so grateful to have met Everest during my interview that day. I can honestly say he has not only changed his client's life, he changed mine too.



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guidedogsoftexas.org

"N" Litter Is Born and Goes On an ADVENTURE!

The "N" Litter, sponsored by the Argo Group, was born just as COVID-19 restrictions were implemented in Texas. Our dedicated Early Canine Manager, Martha Menchaca and her dear family, quickly moved Cora and her pups to her home, where they embarked on their incredible learning adventure on the path to becoming a guide dog. Here are some of the photos from their first steps to their inauguration of the Kym Rapier Puppy Enrichment Center to their puppy raisers. Welcome to our world!





"Argo Group is dedicated to giving back to the communities in which we live and work. Over the past three years, we've supported Guide Dogs of Texas by sponsoring an Advanced Training group and two guide dog puppy litters, including the most recent 'N' litter. This partnership helps to provide a critical service for individuals who are visually impaired and gives Argo's employees the opportunity to participate by naming the future guide dogs.

This is not only a popular initiative among San Antonio employees, but also with our international colleagues. In fact, our team in London is sponsoring their second guide dog with UK non-profit Guide Dogs."

– David Snowden,
SVP, Group Communications

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"Next Steps" by Ruth Davis

It's been nearly six months since I've received Ivan. From the day I've gotten him, my daily routine has changed for the better. Each morning, he's ready to work. He goes with me to school, to the market, to concerts, and to all the places I want to go. Every outing has become significantly less stressful with him by my side. When on the job, Ivan takes on a fastidious attitude. He does a terrific job of taking me around obstacles and showing me places where I need to watch my footing.

Many people are shocked by his calm demeanor when I tell them he is only 3 years old. They don't get to see him off his harness and full of energy ready to play. On a weekday, he attends all my classes with me and listens to me sing and practice violin in the practice rooms. On the weekend, he gets to go to the dog park to play and attend church to be a Christian dog.

In the upcoming fall, I am transferring to Stephen F. Austin State University. Of course Ivan will come! I remember, during the auditions to get into the University, the professors were surprised to see someone with a guide dog auditioning on violin. They were very aware of how to behave around a service dog as one of the other music professors also had a guide dog. It made me happy and excited to live on and attend their university. I know Ivan and I will do well exploring and navigating the next step in our life together.



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Dear Friends of GDTx,

I'm deeply grateful to everyone who has supported our mission and shared our story during this difficult time. The people we serve are especially vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in ways that many people don't think about. I wanted to share some of these issues that we've encountered in the last couple months, and what you can do to help.

1. **Tactile Contacts.** When you're blind, you're taught to navigate indoors by using special wall contact techniques, called 'trailing'. While sighted people are avoiding railings and surfaces, if you're visually impaired or blind, this may be impossible.
2. **Human Assistance.** Sometimes our clients and applicants will take someone's arm to get to a location. This type of guiding requires close contact. We've seen some creative solutions, though, like using shopping carts as 'spacers'.
3. **Social Distancing.** Guide Dog owners are relying on pedestrians to be courteous and not approach to pet their guide dog. If you're blind, you may not know how close you are to someone else. We're spreading this message to remind everyone to help our clients stay safe.
4. **Food.** Many times, the websites to order food and find those elusive delivery windows, are not very accessible using screen-readers if you're blind. In Austin, however, the special transit service teamed up with the food bank and a grocery store to deliver bags of groceries to people who are disabled. How cool is that?
5. **Public Transportation.** Many of our guide dog teams use public transportation every day to get around. While buses have been doing everything in their power to reduce risk and provide social distance between passengers, this still adds risk for our constituents.
6. **Additional Health Factors.** I think also about the guide dog owners who are alone and isolated right now, the guide dog owners who are elderly, and people with other risk factors. Some of our clients lost their sight due to diabetes. Some diabetics also have kidney damage, requiring travel to a dialysis center several times a week.

We're so concerned about our guide dog owners, and everyone out there trying to navigate this crisis.

Here's what you can do to help:

1. **Donate on our website to support our efforts!** We are reaching out to all of our applicants and clients, making sure they have what they need and that their dogs have enough food and medications too.
2. **Let people know about the special challenges** of living through the pandemic while visually impaired and blind. Follow us on social media and share our messages.



Guide Dog Keller says social distancing is difficult

3. If you have extra hand sanitizer, Lysol wipes, gloves and masks, please consider mailing them to our address. We want to make sure that everyone has what they need to stay safe, and also that our staff have enough safety equipment.

4. Lastly, please stay safe yourself.

Thank you again so much for supporting our mission. When this pandemic started, we cancelled all of our spring fundraising events, the stock market plummeted and the unemployment numbers rose. I thought of all of the people who need guide dogs, all of our teams across Texas, and all of the puppies in training, and I worried that our financial support would drop. The donations that have come in since then are true blessings. I'm so touched by the generosity, and I thank you for keeping the faith with us. Please continue to help us serve Texas in the difficult months to come.

Your friend with Guide Dogs of Texas,

Sandy

CEO and Guide Dog Mobility Instructor

We lost one of our guide dog owners over the weekend. His name was Ethan, and we've worked with him for about 18 years now. I trained him with his first guide dog, and when his dog was ready to retire and he needed a replacement, I helped an apprentice guide dog mobility instructor (now our Training Director) named Jamie place him with his next guide dog. It was Jamie's first time working with a client on class.

When we first met Ethan, he was very isolated. His confidence soared with his guide dog and he got a job he liked, met his future wife, and lived a very active lifestyle. He was a unique person and will be missed. Our Austin Instructor Natalie matched Ethan with a new guide dog, Jack last year, who we also grieve for, because we know how deeply the dogs get attached to their owners.

Stay well everyone! – Sandy Merrill



Ethan with his first Guide Dog, Milo.