



InSight

The Newsletter of Guide Dogs of Texas
SPRING 2021

Mobility. Freedom. Independence.

Lesson Learned with An Apprentice GDMI and His Pack

By Lawrence Czelusta AGDMI

Every morning, my phone alarm awakens me. I'm not a morning person by any means ... however, it's important I get to my students on time. Bright eyed, attentive, yearning for knowledge and waggy, my students are dogs, and not just any dogs, they're Guide Dogs – dogs that will be the eyes for a Texan with blindness.

As an Apprentice Guide Dog Mobility Instructor, my team of five guide dogs and I form a pack. The team is always ready to learn and to work. In fact, they'll try to shove each other out of the way when it comes time to walk, but I won't tolerate that sort of thing and "sits" are mandatory. So, now they just try to telepathically "will" me with their eyes to pick them for the next walk. There have been many times I've been met with sad puppy dog eyes and deep sighs; they'll resign themselves to laying down. It's in those moments, when my pups are ready to go, or when I see how much they miss their work, that gives me the motivation I need to get them out and train every day.

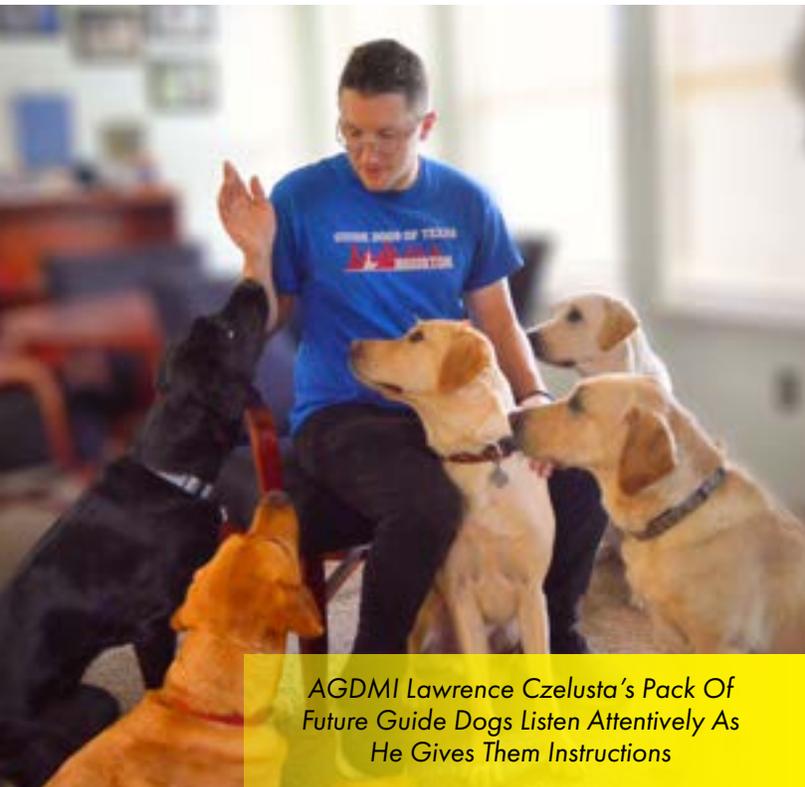
My dogs' enthusiastic attitude towards work and knowing how happy they will be once they are able to work for their person, helps me to stay positive... even if I'm running on four hours of sleep.



They have taught me that having the willingness to rise to the occasion for the pack, no matter how difficult, can be tremendously fulfilling. We have to work together to solve problems and override the dogs' natural instincts. Guide Dogs become self-aware of the instincts that can cause problems over time; they know what their bodies want to do and they learn self-control and moderation as they go. For example, I've seen dogs want to walk far from a bush, because they know they'll want to sniff it. But, we must keep our straight line and we'll work it out so they can walk close to that bush and not sniff it. I've also seen dogs turn into puppies again when they see someone from their past, only to catch themselves. Some days are easy for them, and then others can be really hard.

Guide Dogs in training have to learn to ignore other dogs barking at them, a tempting piece of strategically dropped fried chicken, children excited just being around a dog, or weather changes like wind and pouring rain.

Yet, the future guide dogs prefer to be wearing their "uniform" of a harness and handle to staying at home or just relaxing. They know are not working for themselves; they are working for their pack. It's this positive attitude, desire and willingness is what produces the unique relationship between handler and dog, and eventually the deeper bond of owner and Guide Dog. It's also produced at least one instructor that is learning to be more "waggy" in the morning.



AGDMI Lawrence Czelusta's Pack Of Future Guide Dogs Listen Attentively As He Gives Them Instructions

guidedogsoftexas.org





LouAnn Williams & Guide Dog Atlas (Center) March in Virtual Lions Parade

Guide Dogs of Texas Lions Club Parade Across the World

Guide Dogs of Texas Lions Club members joined Lions from multiple districts across San Antonio in April for the Lions Club International Virtual Parade of Nations which will be aired at the Lions Club International Convention in June. Representing Texas with pride, Lions paraded across San Antonio’s Lions Field as the cameras rolled. Among those on hand from the GDTX Lions Club were Club President Lion Gene Williams and GDTX Board Vice President, Lion LouAnn Williams (and her GDTX Guide Dog, Atlas). If you are interested in joining the Guide Dogs of Texas Lions Club, please contact Lion Andrea Melcher at andrea@guidedogsoftexas.org or Lion Carol Ann Tonn at carolann@guidedogsoftexas.org.

Virtual Mission Tour Gives Girl Scouts a Look into the Life of a Guide Dog Traveler

Members of San Antonio Girl Scout Troop 614 were among the guests at the May 6th Guide Dogs of Texas Virtual Mission Tour that featured an overview of GDTX and its training, donor, and volunteer programs, as well as a Q & A session with GDTX client Dr. Gail Walden and her Guide Dog Dante. CEO Sandy Merrill welcomed the Zoom guests and introduced the GDTX team and mission. Apprentice GDMI Lawrence Czelusta discussed his experience working with the dogs in advanced training, and both he and Director of Development Dr. Carol Ann Tonn turned their cameras to the reveal happy future guide dogs sharing their offices, much to the delight of the attendees.

But the real star was Gail, a veteran GDTX guide dog traveler and researcher at the South Texas VA Hospital located in San Antonio’s South Texas Medical Center. She often walks up to a mile to catch her bus to work and shared that her “very clever” Guide Dog Dante helps her navigate even the most challenging roads.

“One day, I was walking to work in my neighborhood, and because of construction, they had the sidewalk dug up,” Gail explained. “When there is no sidewalk, the dogs are trained to walk parallel with the curb. So, I would tell him go right and he would walk along the curb.”

Unbeknownst to Gail, nearly an entire block of sidewalk was dug up, and instead of traveling in the street, Dante led her to a safer place to walk across the street and then back again on their route. “I give him great credit for figuring out. That is pretty phenomenal!”

GDTX Mission Tours are held monthly and are free and open to the public. To make a reservation and for more information, please visit guidedogsoftexas.org or call 210-366-4081.



GDTX Client Dr. Gail Walden & Guide Dog Dante

Increasing Equity and Inclusion

Guide Dogs of Texas is excited to announce a new Spanish language video – available for viewing now on guidedogsoftexas.org or on the GDTX YouTube Channel. GDTX wants all Texans to have access to important information and ensure that Spanish-speaking prospective clients are aware of GDTX's services.

Special thanks to Buddy Calvo and Perla Rivera at Machina Cinema for their generosity in producing the video featuring the voice of GDTX's own Early Canine Program Manager, Martha Menchaca, as well as providing additional raw footage for Guide Dogs of Texas to use.



GDTX CEO Sandy Merrill & GDTX Ambassador Dog Billy Welcome Shafer Services Representatives & Shafer Serves Mascot Celia to the GDTX Campus

Shafer Serves Helps Clear the Air

Shafer Serves, the philanthropic arm of Shafer Services Plus, donated and installed a virus-killing air purification system and other HVAC improvements at GDTX – an in-kind value of more than \$8,000.

On hand for the April event was Shafer's Service Mascot, Celia, a retired GDTX Guide Dog, who enjoyed visiting her alma mater and meeting the current "K9 students" in our Advanced Training Program.

"We're so grateful for this 'in kind' donation," said CEO Sandy Merrill. "This partnership allows us to put more resources directly into preparing future generations of guide dogs for Texans who are blind."

Making New Roads at Guide Dogs of Texas

If you've been to the GDTX main campus lately, you may have noticed a beautiful new concrete driveway leading from the curb to the main building's front porch. The old asphalt drive was beginning to buckle, and thanks to the generosity of David and Becki Holmes and Urban Concrete's Ronnie and Terry Urbanczyk, Guide Dogs of Texas has a safer entrance to our campus! A new garden has been created by landscaper Victor Tobar at Divine Landscape Design that will include a commemorative plaque featuring the pawprint of Callie, the Holmes's GDTX ambassador dog.



New Garden & Driveway Installed at GDTX

Foundation Support In 2020

Guide Dogs of Texas relies solely on the generosity of individuals, corporations, and foundations to propel our mission. Special thanks to the Charitable Foundations who provided grant support in 2020:

Tegna Foundation

Green Door

Stephen & Mary Birch Foundation, Inc.

Mays Family Foundation

Junior League of San Antonio/Goodwill

James Avery Artisan Jewelry Forging Hope

The Ryan Foundation

Elizabeth Huth Coates Charitable Foundation of 1992

Ed Rachal Foundation

Houston Delta Gamma Foundation

The Alfred S. Gage Foundation

Albert & Ethel Herzstein Charitable Foundation

Robert E. & Evelyn McKee Foundation

Amy Shelton McNutt Charitable Trust

San Antonio Area Foundation

City of San Antonio/LiftFund Inc.

Charles A. Frueauff Foundation

Dallas Delta Gamma Foundation

Faye L. and William L. Cowden Charitable Foundation

Baptist Health Foundation of San Antonio

J.L. Williams Foundation





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EMPOWER Guide Dogs of Texas by Becoming a Sustainer!

As monthly donors, the GDTX Circle of Sustainers members are the heart of the support of the Guide Dogs of Texas mission. The consistency of monthly giving helps GDTX strategize its business plan to directly impact programs. To help build awareness of this unique giving opportunity, GDTX has updated its materials and initiated new benefit levels, such as adding a new category just for Students at \$15 per month.

For more information on how you can support GDTX as a member of the Circle of Sustainers, please visit guidedogsoftexas.org or contact Director of Development Dr. Carol Ann Tonn at (210)366-4081 or carolann@guidedogsoftexas.org.



Meet the P Litter!

**Peaches, Paisley,
Price, Patriot, Pawla,
Pickles, Pilot**

Born November 2020

**Just \$17 a day can provide a
day of guided sight!**

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