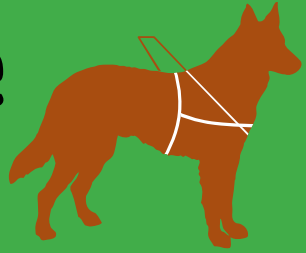


# Independence Guide Dogs



# Q U E S T

Fall 2013



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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

At the time I am writing this article, Independence Guide Dogs is just over 10 months old as a 501c3 non-profit organization and it has been only about 18 months since our first pups were donated. The idea of starting the first kennel-free guide dog training program in North America has been in the works for less than two years. Although it has been a rewarding process, and we are very proud of IGD's accomplishments,

there is still a lot of work to do.

Few people realize that it takes the better part of two years to produce a working guide dog team. Consider the time and energy it takes to select a breeding pair that one hopes will produce successful puppies. After waiting with bated breath for the babies in gestation, a newly born litter must spend the first eight weeks of their lives with their mom. When they are eight weeks old we can place them with their loving and generous puppy raisers. In addition to the six to eight months needed for breeding and whelping, the puppy raising process takes 12 to 14 months. Add another six months for formal guide dog training, and you can easily see why it takes two years to produce a working guide dog team.

However, the challenges do not end there. It is a well-known fact among guide dog training organizations that the average success rate for guide dogs is a jaw-dropping 45 percent! I have had the pleasure of raising two pups for IGD. My first pup didn't make the cut, but I am happy to say that my second pup, XeeLo, is doing well in formal training.

The responsibility of guiding a blind person is one of the most difficult jobs we can ask a dog to do. This statistic and my experience as a puppy raiser punctuate that challenge. Although, I must tell you that watching XeeLo's success thus far in the Home-to-Harness Training Program has helped me accept this challenge as a puppy raiser and President of IGD. It is truly a joyous experience to change the life of a blind person by raising a future guide dog.

# DOGS IN TRAINING



## BOZZY

Donated by Tricia Wicklund of Eisenberg German Shepherds located in Iron Mountain, MI, Bozzy was born March 29, 2012. He has spent his puppyhood with Scott and Gail Babbitt. He will remain with the Babbitts during his formal training.

## XEELO

Born May 12, 2012 XeeLo was donated to IGD by Julia Priest of Galt, CA. His puppy raiser was IGD president and founder, Toby Willis. XeeLo officially began his formal training in September.



## DAZZLER

Dazzler came to IGD from Watcher Engel K9 in Winchester, CT. She is one of the first pups donated to IGD. She born February 4, 2012 and was raised by Linda Evangelisti.

# ON DECK

## NIRA

Raised by Robin Hudson in Washington, Nira was born November 16, 2012. She was donated by Mary Severson. Formal training is right around the corner for this beautiful girl.



# THE BIRTH OF IGD'S BREED PROGRAM

With volunteer, Julia Priest, and IGD's COO and VP of Animal Husbandry, Donna Morgan Murray at the helm, the IGD breeding program is underway. So what do we look for when we breed for future IGD guide dogs? There are several items of particular importance. First, the breed stock comes from working lines rather than show lines. Why is this? Those who breed for shows try to produce a particular style or appearance in order to win competitions. This is best accomplished by closer line breeding or inbreeding, where closely related dogs of very similar type are bred together to produce more of the same. In the working dog world, dogs are bred for temperament and workability and close line or inbreeding is not the norm. This results in more differentiation in size and coat, but within the same breed standard.

What is the standard? While a 100 pound German Shepherd Dog (GSD) may look impressive, it is usually not desirable as a police or search dog because of reduced agility and the difficulty the handler would encounter when lifting or carrying the dog. Ever try to lift a 100 pound dog up into an attic to search? As for guide dogs, most handlers travel and having an overly large dog makes riding public transportation more difficult. Breeding for the GSD "standard" means a medium sized, powerful, agile, athletic dog that is balanced in his movement and without extremes of angulation in the front or rear. According to the standard, males are 24-26 inches at the shoulder and females 22-24 inches.

Correct temperament in both parents, a solid nerve base, balanced drive, and an eagerness to work with their human partner are primary characteristics we strive for. However, breeding is not as easy as picking your "options" and putting two dogs together. It requires not only a fair amount of understanding of canine genetics, but a well developed eye for the traits you want. And last, but certainly not least, a huge measure of luck as genes combine the way they want to-not always the way you plan.



How the pups are raised in the early days and weeks goes a long way toward improving (or worsening) their development. Lots of neural stimulation, contact with people and early learning as well as exposure to scents, textures and sounds are very important. Puppies raised in a home environment by a breeder who spends the time to imprint them are measurably smarter and better balanced than puppies raised in a sterile kennel environment.



## TRAINING TIPS

### Tip 1: Positive Reinforcement

Rather than just correcting your dog's unwanted behavior, focus on rewarding your pup for good behavior. Dogs do what works for them, so rewarding good behavior goes a long way, much further than corrections. Think about what you can do to encourage the behavior you are looking for and teach and reward that behavior. For example, teach your pup to sit before petting, feeding or putting on its leash. And remember, the "reward" doesn't always have to be a treat. Praise or a scratch behind the ear is just as effective.

### Tip 2: Say it Once and Only Once

It may sound simple, but next time you give your dog a command note how many times you say it. If it's more than once, it's too much.

Repeating a command over and over can be confusing to your pooch. For example, if you want your dog to sit and you give the "sit" command 4 times your dog may not know on which "sit" command he/she should actually sit. Instead engage your dog, clearly state the command once and wait for it to respond.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?



Now that the IGD breed program is underway, we needed a meaningful "kennel" name for our pups. The name had to have a connection to IGD's mission and since it would be German, it also needed to be easily pronounced by all of us here in the good old USA. With a little help from some friends in Germany, we decided on "von der Freiheit" meaning "of freedom" - an

appropriate name for the many IGD pups that will become guide dogs and bring the gift of freedom to their visually impaired partners.

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There is no shortage of clients waiting for their next guide dog. According to the U.S. Census, there are approximately 1.8 million individuals with visual impairments in the U.S. today, only 8500 of which have a working guide dog. The 1 1/2 to two year waiting list at nearly every guide dog training program highlights the enormous need that IGD is helping to fill. Here we are challenged to identify the right client for the dogs we have ready for our LIFE Training Program. I'm sure, however, that the woes of this challenge will be mitigated by the joy felt by our deserving clients and all of us involved with IGD in a few weeks when we place our first Independence Guide dogs.

While there are many challenges in the process of raising and placing guide dogs, the biggest challenge of all is securing the funding needed to provide guide dogs to our clients, free of charge. According to a 2007 study conducted by our friends at the Seeing Eye Foundation, it cost more than \$50,000 to produce a guide dog team. IGD's innovative model has us set to land somewhere far south of that figure; around \$25,000 per dog. That, however, is still a lot of money. However, with the generosity of our supporters, I remain confident that we will find the funding necessary to raise, train and place the dogs currently in the IGD program, and whelp the litter we hope to have next month.

As we approach the last few months of IGD's first two years in operation, I reflect and learn from the known and unknown challenges we have faced. More importantly, I am compelled to look forward; fueled by the joys that are mine from this experience. Meeting you and knowing of your philanthropy is the greatest joy. Together we will dramatically change the lives of dozens of visually impaired individuals over the course of the next two years and beyond.

On a Quest,



# TOP DOGS

*Recognizing those whose contributions have had a major impact on helping IGD achieve its mission to "increase independence for blind individuals".*

## Julia Priest

"There are lots of different kinds of wonderful dogs in the world, but once your heart is taken by a German Shepherd, there is no other". These are the words of Julia Priest. A lover of German

Shepherd Dogs (GSD) since she was little, Julia's uncle introduced police dogs to the St. Louis Police Department after WWII. He brought home a GSD named Dinah with whom Julia bonded immediately. Then when her hero, Roy Rogers, sped across her family's tiny black and white TV screen in 1955 with his brave partner, Bullet by his side, her mind was set: German Shepherds were the best dogs in the world. Otherwise, why would Roy Rogers have one?

Growing up in a Navy family, Julia didn't have the chance to own a lot of dogs but more than one "followed her home." Never one to play with Barbies or dolls, Julia would "borrow" the neighbor's dog, Mac, and tried to teach him the things she saw war dogs do in books and on TV. In 1982, Julia became a police officer and bought "Sonja" who became her first real dog to train. Then, in 1988 Julia was offered the choice of becoming an investigative detective or working with a K9. It was a no brainer for this lover of GSDs. She purchased "Bolo" and learned to train him for the street. The pair developed a partnership and had many successes capturing bad guys and locating evidence. In 1993 Bolo was stabbed in the neck by a suspect. He showed tremendous heroism by staying on the suspect while injured until Julia was able to make the arrest. Bolo recovered, but retired the next year.

In 1989, after much research, Julia decided to breed Sonja and Sontausen's AK Schh3 started life as a search and rescue prospect. Seeing the level of skill and drive needed for search and rescue tasks inspired Julia to produce more working dogs. It was about this time when young Polly Klass was taken from her own home and murdered. Julia recalls her outrage and immediate thought that had a good German Shepherd been with Polly and her friends, she would likely be with us today. This was the turning point for Julia's dedication to produce dogs that could do the work they were designed to do, and have the stable, loyal temperaments to live as family companions and protectors.

When Julia learned of IGD and their mission to breed, raise and train GSD guide dogs, she was eager to support the cause and donated Sonja's great great grandson, XeeLo, to IGD. He is now in his formal guide dog training, and Julia could not be more proud. With her expertise in breeding GSD working dogs, Julia is also leading the development of IGD's breeding program.



# MEET THE TRAINERS

One of the most crucial positions for IGD's success is their certified Guide Dog Mobility Instructors (GDMI). Meet the first two trainers to fill this important role with IGD.

## Jennifer Caley



Jennifer Caley became IGD's first trainer on staff. She has 16 years experience as a guide dog trainer, instructor and apprentice. She is married with 3 children, a cat and 3 dogs which include a retired German Shepherd guide dog breed dog, a German Shepherd career change dog and a hound mix.

Jennifer is currently training IGD pup, Dazzler.

## Tiffany Riggs



Tiffany Riggs has a Bachelors degree in Animal Science from the University of New Hampshire. She brings six years of guide dog training experience to IGD.

Her past responsibilities include the implementation

of training protocols, oversight of apprentice trainers, and in-community guide dog placements. Married with 2 children and 2 dogs Tiffany is currently training IGD pup, Bozzy.

# PUPPY RAISERS

*Our puppy raisers are a vital part of the IGD organization. They are key to the early development of our future guide dogs. If you are interested in becoming an IGD puppy raiser please visit [www.igdogs.org](http://www.igdogs.org) and complete an application. An adorable IGD puppy is waiting for you.*

## Scott, Gail & Bozzy



Scott and Gail Babbitt have raised German Shepherds for guide work for 20 years. They have raised a total of 17 dogs: 10 became guides, 3 became breed dogs and 3 pets. They have also gone full circle with four of their dogs coming back to live with them in their retirement years.

The latest addition to the Babbitt's two decades of puppy raising is IGD pup, Bozzy. Sharing their home with retired breed dog, Addie, Bozzy is a handsome and curious dog with lots of energy. His favorite toy is a jolly ball, and he has two of them. It is quite hilarious when he tries to get both of them in his mouth at once. While he loves to play, when his IGD vest goes on Bozzy is serious about his work. He loves to be out and about.

Having raised nearly 20 dogs it might seem hard to believe the Babbitts find time for other activities including kayaking, bicycling, playing cards and spending time with friends and family including their two children and grandson.

## Robin, Nira & Angus

Robin Hudson has been training dogs since the mid 80's. He has trained dogs for just about anything you could think of: Schutzhund, protection, narcotics, search and rescue work, and rectifying behavioral issues. He would often see people with puppies in training and thought, what better way to give back than to raise puppies for someone in need. So in 2010 he began raising dogs for Canine Companions for Independence (CCI). He has raised 4 CCI dogs on his own and has had as many as 25 CCI dogs spend time in his home.

Now raising pups for IGD one might call Robin a glutton for punishment. He is the official puppy raiser for not one, but two IGD pups: Nira and Angus. He also helps with raising Antje, littermate to Angus, and took in IGD pup, Gizmo for one month. If that isn't enough, the four-legged members of the Hudson household do not stop with Nira and Angus. There are 9 dogs currently living and training in the Hudson home.



# IN MEMORY

*Dedicated to donations made in memory of the 2 and 4-legged friends and family that have contributed so much to our lives.*



## GUNNAR

*In loving memory of our "G-Man" from the LaMothes of Harwinton, CT*

daily to retrieve our shoes. He never destroyed them, just collected them. Can't say the same for his favorite Kong toys, his powerful jaw sheared the top off in minutes and was no match for so-called "indestructible" toys.

With a number of increasingly debilitating conditions, we had to let Gunnar go in January 2013. Always in our hearts, we will never forget our "G-Man".

Brought into the pound as a "vicious" dog and scheduled to be put down, Gunnar was first rescued by a vet student who quickly noticed his gentle soul. She took the nameless pup home with her determined to find him a home. "Gunnar" joined our family at about 10 months old where he was loved for the next 10+ years.

Gunnar enjoyed playing with Klaus, our GSD, and served as a big brother and role model for three guide dog puppies. A bit of a loner, he loved to hang out in our spare bedroom, a.k.a. "Gunnar's Room" where we went

# EVENTS

## OCTOBER

### Game of Bones

October 26th - Seattle, WA

2nd annual Halloween fundraiser

For more information contact Toby Willis at [toby@igdogs.org](mailto:toby@igdogs.org)

## NOVEMBER

### Washington Council of the Blind State Convention

November 7-9th - Spokane, WA

Guide Dog Users of Washington meeting

Luncheon speaker: Toby Willis, President IGD

For more information visit <http://www.gduws.net> or

<http://www.gduws.net>

## GIVE THE GIFT OF INDEPENDENCE

**Would you like to help Independence Guide Dogs achieve their mission to increase independence for blind individuals?**

**Visit [www.igdogs.org](http://www.igdogs.org) to make a secure online donation & learn other ways you can help.**



IGD is a 501 (c) 3 organization

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