

FidelcoNews

Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation

60th Anniversary Edition

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a difference



Brad and "Gizzy"

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Front cover: Visit
<https://fidelco.org/category/client-stories/>
to learn more about Fidelco client Brad S.
and his guide dog, "Gizzy."

Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation, Inc.



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Fidelco.org



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Continuing the mission during COVID-19.

As of March 17, 2020, most of Fidelco's staff is working remotely. Every precaution is being taken to ensure that dogs-in-training and newborn puppies thrive. We are profoundly grateful to you and to all of our Fidelco family. Your support means we can rise to this challenge.

Who we are. Where we are going.

"Some think of success in terms of money, possessions, or power. I have often defined success in terms of one's impact on humanity."

– Charlie Kaman

The current global health crisis makes our founder's words truer than ever. Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation's very purpose is providing increased independence and safety to our clients who are blind. Your support will help us to secure our future.

Every Fidelco guide dog team takes a commitment of thousands of hours by so many. From breeding, raising, training, and veterinary medicine to the back-office departments running operations and administration, the number of hands "touching" each guide dog are almost too many to count. As are the number of clients, families, friends, and communities who benefit from these partnerships.

Since 1960, we've grown from the Kamans' backyard to 41 states and five Canadian provinces. Yet the one constant has been the undeniable passion of our donors, volunteers, and staff.


We've never been more committed to these partnerships or to keeping Robbie and Charlie Kaman's legacy alive. Upholding the Kamans' spirit of innovation, we're embracing technology, leveraging resources, and collaborating with organizations that share our goals. With your help, even in these uncertain times, our future remains bright.

Warm regards,
The Fidelco Guide Dogs Staff

Where the journey begins.



When asked about the new line of German Shepherd dogs that would become Fidelco's breed stock, Robbie Kaman said: **"There was an unmistakable, intangible character to these dogs from herding lines. Their dedication to the job, and willingness to work with and for their handler were their high points."** These traits that Robbie identified more than 60 years ago provided the foundation for the high-quality dogs that are now synonymous with Fidelco. Robbie described the art and science of breeding as, "a constant process of mixing and matching, finding the right ingredients, accounting for the many intangibles."

Today, Fidelco continues to build upon this history of successful breeding by collaborating with other leading guide dog organizations, specialists, and geneticists. Working with other guide dog schools enables us to create dogs with the most ideal traits for guide dog work while building collaborative partnerships in our sector. 

DID YOU KNOW



A breed dog must be...

- Social with people and other dogs
- Confident in all environments
- Easily able to settle
- Able to remain calm when introduced to other dogs, sounds, and sights
- Able to display positive behavior

Fidelco breed moms...

- Live with volunteer canine caregiver families
- Are eligible to become a breed mom at two years old
- Usually have 3-4 litters

Fidelco guide dog puppies...

- Begin preparing for their work as guide dogs at just three days old by learning basic obedience skills in gradual steps
- Are immersed in a full enrichment and socialization program

Caring is our calling.

The day begins early for Fidelco's Vet-Med staff, and remains fast-paced throughout, while the



three-member team performs medical procedures that keep our dogs healthy. This cohesive, committed team provides the highest quality of patient care every day.

A member of Fidelco's development department had the opportunity to "shadow" the team during a typical day. The observer met with the team one recent morning in Fidelco's state-of-the-art surgical suite to discuss the

day's activities, and briefly run through the appointment schedule.

The team's first stop was the Pup House where a litter of five adorable seven-week-old pups



were examined before they enjoyed some well-deserved play time in the socialization room where they played with a variety of toys, wrestled

with each other, and briefly napped.

The Vet-Med team returned to the surgical suite to prepare for the day's surgeries. The observer was astounded by the level of organization and efficiency the team displayed as they prepared for each surgery—readying sterile surgical packs, providing injections prior to surgery, and monitoring all vital signs at five-minute intervals.

A day in the life of Fidelco's Vet-Med team

7:00 am

- Team gathers to discuss day's agenda
- Injections administered for surgery prep
- Ultrasound of breed mom performed to look for puppies
- Records updated to reflect ultrasound results
- Puppy check-up exams conducted

8:00 am

- Second breed dog mom exam
- Exam of dog in heat
- Medication prep for upcoming surgeries
- Dogs prepped for surgery

9:00 am

Neuter Surgery

10:00 am

- Charting, medical record updates, cleaning
- Spay surgery


In addition to performing surgeries, the team also examined Fidelco dogs at varying stages of development. Young pups in Fidelco's Pup House were among the group, as were older dogs that had completed their formal training and were ready for placement.

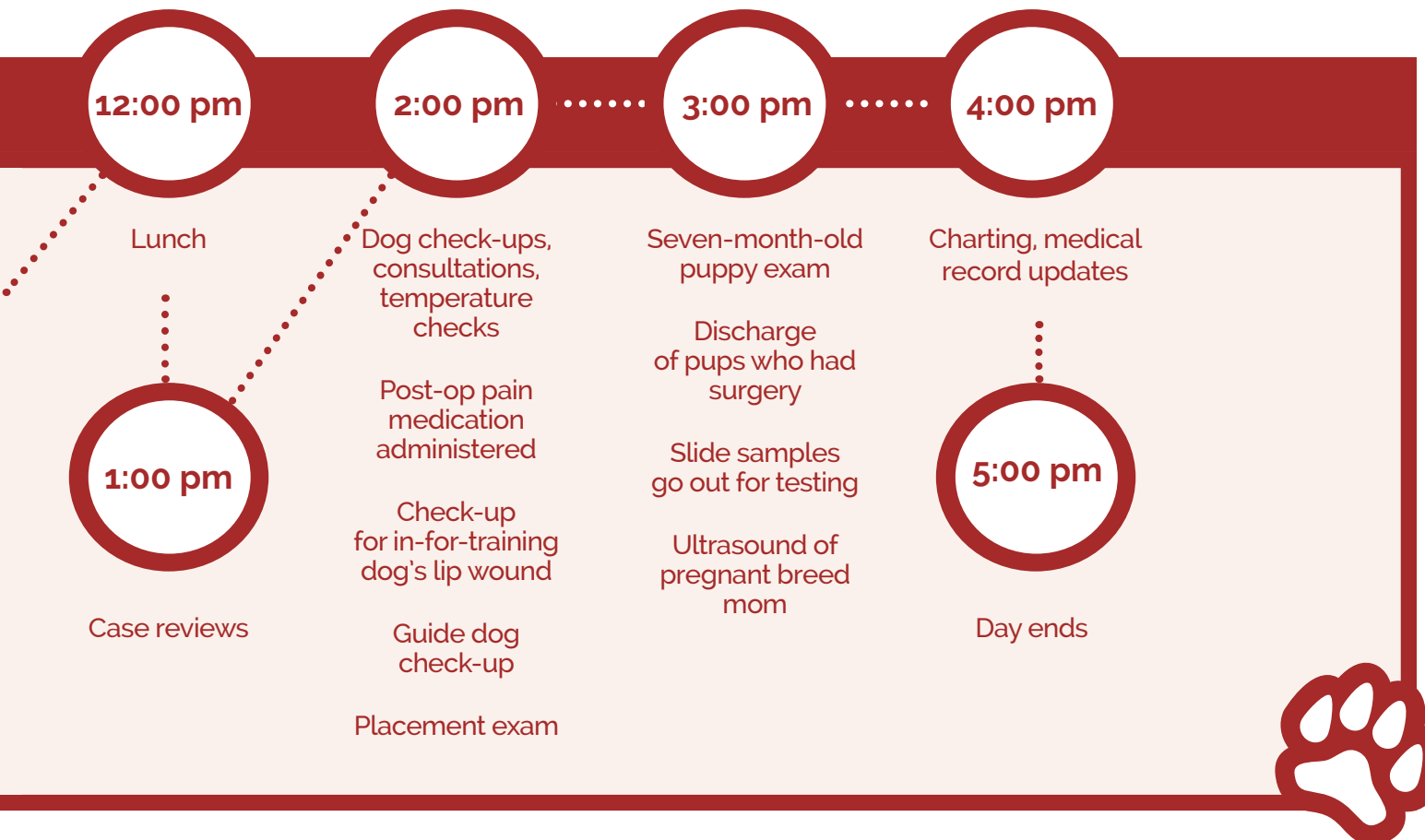


The most exciting part of the day was when an ultrasound of a breed dog mom was performed to determine if she was pregnant. The breed dog's volunteer caregivers were present in the surgical suite, visibly excited to learn if they would catch a glimpse of



developing pups in utero. The caregivers and staff weren't disappointed, as our head veterinarian pointed out each pup visible on the ultrasound screen. While ultrasound identification of pups is a common practice for the Vet-Med team, the observer noted that based on their level of excitement, it was as though this was the first time the team had ever viewed this phenomenon!

While the Vet-Med team's work is often behind the scenes, their role is essential to Fidelco's mission. Their workday is long, and can be tedious and demanding, but this group of dedicated professionals brings energy, enthusiasm, and curiosity to their job each day. 



Puppy Raising 101.

WHO

Anyone can apply to become a Volunteer Puppy Raiser. Applicants complete an online application at Fidelco.org/volunteer, agree to a background check, attend our "Insights" orientation class, and receive a home visit by a member of our puppy raising staff.

WHAT

Give a puppy a loving home. While raising a pup, you and the pup attend Saturday puppy classes, learning basic commands and some guide dog-specific commands. Fidelco pays all medical costs for the puppy throughout the puppy raising program. And, best of all, you get to name the puppy!

WHEN

As a Volunteer Puppy Raiser, you raise and train the puppy from 8 weeks old until approximately 16 months old. At about four months old, the pup has its first evaluation walk with the goal of walking properly on the Puppy Raiser's left side and successfully handling whatever it encounters in its environment—traffic, people, other dogs, etc. If the pup performs well, it earns a "red vest", allowing the pup to accompany its Puppy Raiser into any public building; this enables greater access to different environments for improving socialization and training skills.

At six months old, the puppy is brought into the Fidelco facility for its first kennel stay. A second stay occurs at 12 months old. These stays allow the pup to become familiar with the kennel and comfortable being handled by different staff members as is the case during formal guide dog training.

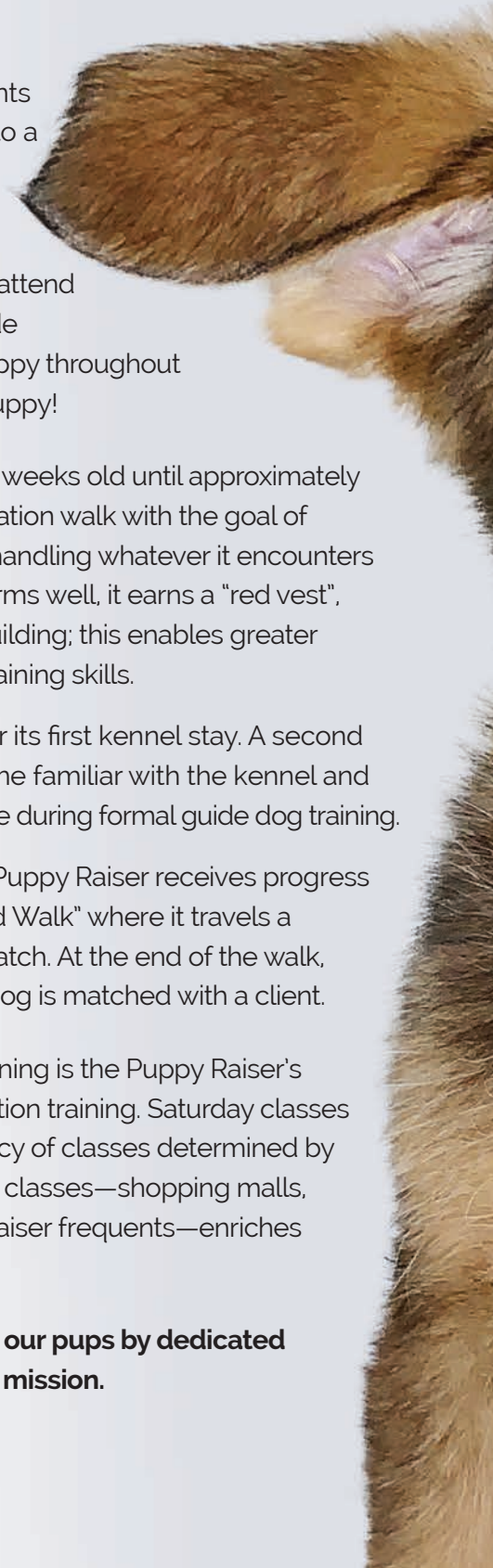
When the young dog is in formal guide dog training, its Volunteer Puppy Raiser receives progress updates. Toward the end of training, the dog completes a "Hartford Walk" where it travels a route in Hartford, CT, and its Volunteer Puppy Raiser is invited to watch. At the end of the walk, the Puppy Raiser reunites with the pup for a final time before the dog is matched with a client.

WHERE

Puppy training occurs in a variety of locations. "Home Base" for training is the Puppy Raiser's home where the pup receives loving care and consistent socialization training. Saturday classes are held at our Bloomfield and Wilton campuses, with the frequency of classes determined by the pup's age. Exposure to environments outside of the home and classes—shopping malls, workplaces, places of worship, and other venues that the Puppy Raiser frequents—enriches the pup's socialization training.

WHY

Without the loving homes and socialization training provided to our pups by dedicated Volunteer Puppy Raisers, Fidelco could not continue to fulfill its mission.





PUPPY RAISING FACTS

Current pups
in the Volunteer
Puppy Raising
Program

61

Since January
2000

1,644
pups born

Most pups
raised by one
Puppy Raiser

40

Fidelco names and identifies puppies by using the alphabet.

For example, pups in the "T-28" litter all have names beginning with the letter "T," and the 28 signifies that we've gone through the alphabet 28 times.

Career change

If a pup doesn't qualify for guide dog work, different career paths are offered, including law enforcement, search and rescue, and security. Sometimes, the best option for the pup is to become a wonderful pet. **We always find them loving, forever homes.**

Fidelco: Always moving forward.

1960s

In the 1960s, the Kamans were breeding German Shepherds in their home kennel, placing them with Puppy Raisers, and then donating them to other guide dog schools for training.

At that time, "force-based" methods (known as traditional methods) were the most common way for trainers to encourage dogs to perform.

Very little, if any, food rewards were used at this time, as it was assumed that dogs would perform out of a willingness to please their handler or an intrinsic desire to perform the behavior requested. These methods were common practice in both the pet dog and guide dog fields.

1980s

It wasn't until 1980 that the Kamans hired a Director of Training as their first employee.

Fidelco trained and placed five guide dogs in 1981, using its pioneering "In-Community Placement" model.

Fidelco's first breeding, animal care, and training facility was built in 1984.

1990s

Fidelco's office space and kennel expansion were completed in 1991. During this time, clicker/marker-based training began to gain popularity among dog trainers, and a trend toward gentler handling methods began. This type of training focuses on setting the dog up to be successful by reinforcing the correct behavior as opposed to punishing incorrect behavior.

The guide dog training sector was slower to adapt to the idea of using food rewards and clicker training; it was a common belief that guide dogs should not

be trained with rewards for fear it could distract them from their work. The belief also persisted that a person who is visually impaired may not be able to or want to use food rewards.

Throughout the 1990s, Fidelco's breeding trended toward developing a more sensitive and easier-to-handle dog. With positive training becoming mainstream, Fidelco began to experiment with additional positive-based training methods. Fidelco trainers started using more food rewards, and later began to incorporate marker-based training or "clicker" training into the guide dog training protocol. Trainers also began using head collars such as Gentle Leaders® and Haltis® as an alternative to chain collars. Head halter-type collars are useful in preventing sniffing and are better able to control the dog's head than a collar around the neck. This gives the handler a little more control without being overly aversive for the dog.

2000s

In the 2000s, Puppy Raisers began using head collars, and trainers continued to find applications for clicker training in the guide dog training protocol. The trainers were also presented with continuing education opportunities that enhanced their understanding of training methods.




In training, dogs are becoming more active participants in their learning and ultimately demonstrate a stronger retention of desired skills. Once a skill is learned, the dog is held accountable; if an incorrect or inappropriate behavior occurs, the trainers use natural consequences to correct the inappropriate behavior. For example, if a dog becomes distracted, the handler may exaggeratedly bump into an obstacle or trip on a curb. This correction is often enough to discourage the dog from getting distracted, and to pay more attention to his work. The trainers will also re-work the skill to give the dog another chance to perform the skill correctly.





Today and tomorrow

We are constantly seeking innovative ways to train dogs so we can meet the changing and unique needs of our clients. Most recently, trainers began including electric vehicles in traffic training because with near-silent engines, dogs must learn to respond to the sight of the vehicle and not merely the engine sound.

We are proud of our relationship with United Airlines which allows us the opportunity to board empty planes with dogs while working on appropriate travel behavior. Advances in equipment provide the opportunity to customize the training experience for our dogs. Like humans, no two dogs are the same. 



FUN FACTS

-  Fidelco guide dogs know approximately 80 commands by the time they are ready to be placed with a client.
-  "Intelligent disobedience" is an essential skill for guide dogs. This term refers to a guide dog resisting the handler's command in an effort to make a better decision in a situation that could be dangerous. The concept of "intelligent disobedience" has been part of service animal training since at least 1936.

Welcome Home

Fidelco's kennel, affectionately known as "Hotel Fidelco," is a warm and welcoming place for dogs-in-training. Fidelco puppies, raised in the loving homes of volunteer Puppy Raisers, return to Fidelco twice—at 6 months and again at 12 months—before coming back for formal training. This gradual kennel transition makes it much easier for our dogs to stay in the kennel for the duration of their formal training before they are matched with a client.




Kennel staff work tirelessly to ensure that dogs in-for-training have the most positive experience possible during their stay. Happy dogs are also more eager and able to learn the skills they will need to effectively guide a partner.

Morning walks before breakfast (which is sometimes served al fresco in nice weather) are part of the kennel experience.

Dogs-in-training go out for the day with their respective trainers, each of whom has a "string" of approximately six dogs they are training simultaneously. Dogs return from training to a special treat and plenty of opportunities to unwind before dinner. Most dogs have a

bunk mate to play with, in addition to toys, puppy chews, and bones. The dinner menu varies based on the individual needs of each dog. A biscuit on each dog's cot ends the day—a "turn down" service of sorts that can be enjoyed while listening to a story on tape or relaxing music.

Creating this environment for our dogs paves the way to success. Many years of experimenting with different approaches and incentives have resulted in an experience that is both effective and mindful of what Fidelco dogs-in-training need to thrive. 

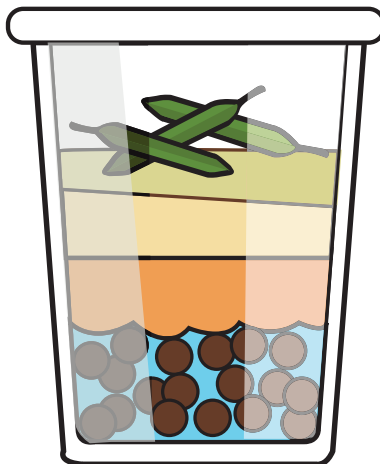


Pup cup recipe

- 1/4 cup of kibble in the bottom of a plastic cup
- Add water to just above kibble
- 1/4 cup sweet or regular mashed potatoes
- 1/4 cup applesauce
- 3 tablespoons of unsweetened peanut butter
- A few green beans for garnish

Instructions:

- Freeze for at least 4 hours
- Pop out of the cup & let your pup enjoy this frozen treat!

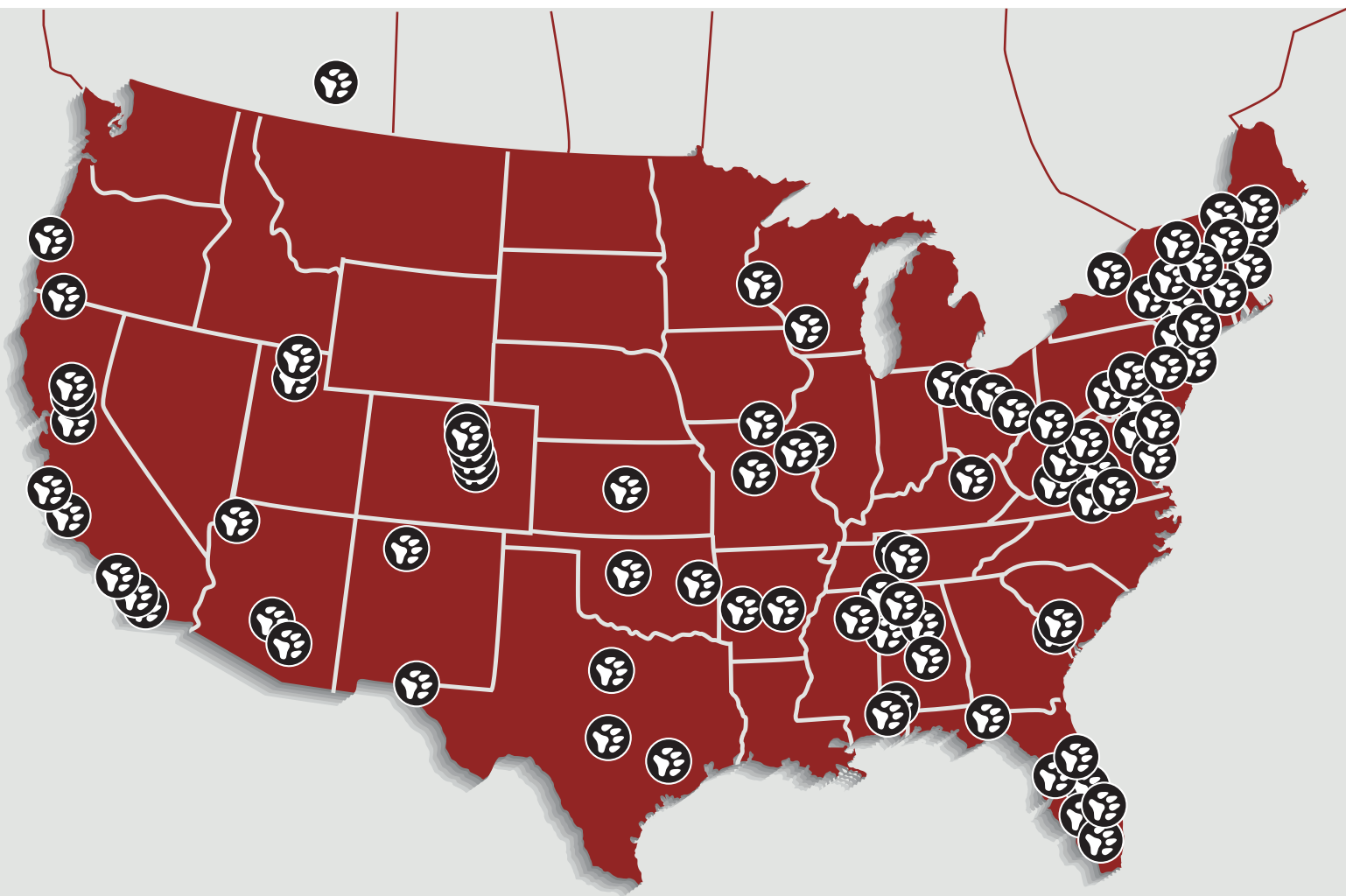


Try preparing this Fidelco dog favorite "pup cup" recipe for your dog at home!



Covering a lot of ground together.

Since 1960, more than 1,500 Fidelco guide dog teams have journeyed through life together. Our clients often tell us how profoundly their guide dogs have impacted their lives. But the mark they leave on all they encounter is equally powerful. We are privileged to witness their triumphs and challenges. Many of our clients return for successor guide dogs, and some have been with us for decades. Sharing in their lives is part of what makes our work so deeply gratifying.



**Scan to see where Fidelco guide dogs
are helping our clients.**



A remarkable and wonderful journey: Client letter to Fidelco.

Dear Fidelco Family,

My journey over the last 55 years has been both remarkable and wonderful. It started in 1965 when I received my first guide dog. In 1983, when I was ready to get my third dog, a friend told me about Fidelco. I knew I wanted another German Shepherd which could not be guaranteed to me by the school I had gone to in the past. I am forever grateful to my friend; her recommendation changed my life.

I was very excited when I learned I was accepted to Fidelco in 1984, and received my first Fidelco guide dog, "Indy." Thirty-six years later, I continue to be proud and grateful I am still a client. In 1993 when I was ready for another guide dog, a Fidelco trainer brought two beautiful German Shepherds—a sister and brother pair, named "Aries" and "Apollo." One was for me, and the other for my son, Keith. We were the first mother and son to receive dogs from Fidelco, and Keith was the youngest at age 17 to receive a dog from the organization. Aries and Apollo had very eventful lives with our family; they traveled to Disney World 12 times, and Apollo was right by Keith's side when he earned two advanced degrees. We were blessed to have them until mid-2006, when they were almost 15 years old. They were hard workers and very devoted to us.

In 2006, I received my third and current dog, "Kora." What a remarkable companion and guide she is! We have been all over the country: California, New York, ten more Disney World trips, and, of course, to many walkathons. She loves to travel and is always by my side and ready to go. At 15½, she is amazing, and I can't imagine my life without her.

These wonderful dogs have given me independence and the freedom to go and do whatever I want with ease and total trust in them. I want to thank everyone at Fidelco for making my life so complete. I would like to thank Robbie and Charlie Kaman who made it possible for so many people to find their independence and to live productive lives. Your legacy lives on, especially in Fidelco's wonderful trainers. You will never be forgotten.

Thank you, too, to all the devoted puppy raiser families who give so much love and care to the puppies to get them off to a good start. To the staff, thank you for all you do every day to make Fidelco what it is and always will be—one of the best. Robbie and Charlie would be very proud.

With gratitude, Linda W. and Kora



Volunteering to make a difference.

Volunteers are critical to the success of nonprofit organizations, and particularly to organizations like ours that rely on volunteers to fulfill our mission. Fidelco is fortunate to have hundreds of volunteers who support nearly every aspect of our work. Whether providing administrative or event support, or raising and socializing future guide dogs, Fidelco simply could not operate without volunteers who give their time, energy, and resources every day of the year.

Linda Gilley is a lifelong dog lover who has devoted her time to Fidelco for over 20 years.

Linda's introduction to Fidelco in 1983 was entirely coincidental. Through the window of her Springfield, MA apartment, Linda saw a neighbor walking a guide dog down the street each morning. She was curious about the dog, and her husband, Neil, was able to catch up to the woman one morning and got her phone number. Linda contacted her, and they met several times at a local dog park. During one of their meetings, the neighbor told Linda that Fidelco wasn't too far away, and Linda quickly contacted Fidelco to inquire about becoming a volunteer.

In Fidelco's early years, there was no administrative office, and all calls were routed through the Kaman Corporation. When Linda called, she was told that Charlie Kaman wanted to meet with her.

She fondly recalls sitting in Charlie's beautiful office where he told her they would be building a kennel the next year, and to call back after its completion. Linda considered it a "great honor" to have spent time with Charlie that day and was struck by his pride in Fidelco and hope for its future.

In 1984, Linda began volunteering at the newly completed kennel once a week after work, doing whatever was needed, which often included walking dogs and cleaning kennels. She recalls that Robbie Kaman was a constant, welcoming presence in the puppy area. She also remembers that in those early days, Fidelco's Annual Walks around the Fidelco and Kaman campuses were a huge success with plenty of participants and vendors.

Over the years she has ably assisted with a variety of



Linda and "Ocean"

activities: serving as volunteer coordinator for the Annual Walks, performing administrative tasks, coordinating children's

Continued on next page

Volunteering to make a difference. (continued)


birthday parties, and making presentations for nearly eight years at schools and senior centers throughout Connecticut with her career-change German Shepherd, "Prairie."

Linda beams when she recalls the presentations, stating that they were her favorite of all volunteer activities because

she believes they made a lasting impact on students, teachers, and seniors by educating them about people who are blind and the positive effect that a guide dog has on the quality of their lives.

Linda's enthusiasm for Fidelco hasn't wavered—she is currently conducting Fidelco's

"Insights" orientation program for prospective volunteers and has recently received another career-change German Shepherd dog.

"I love being here," says Linda. "This is my comfortable place. I love all dogs and Fidelco's mission of helping people." 


A supporting role in changing lives.

On any day of the week at Fidelco, dedicated "behind the scenes" staff members can be found deeply invested in the business of changing lives.



The culture of Fidelco is for staff to fully participate in all we do. Walk down the hall at either one of Fidelco's campuses—in Bloomfield or in Wilton—and pass by administrative staff taking Fidelco dogs for a walk as part of their puppy raising or canine caregiving responsibilities.

The energy that permeates our entire organization is never more apparent than when a client and his or her guide dog come to the Fidelco campus for a visit. It's our version of a holiday. The excitement in the building is palpable; every staff member takes time to break away from their busy day to meet or catch up with a client. A look behind the scenes reminds us that all should take pride in knowing they have played a part in creating these inspiring guide dog teams.

We live and breathe the spirit of collaboration it takes to create the ultimate bond that is a Fidelco guide dog partnership. Those who work in the areas of Finance, Client Services, Development, and Technology are laser-focused on their work, but never forget why they're crunching numbers, calling clients, fundraising, or keeping all that data straight. We are proud to have received a 4-star Charity Navigator rating for the fourth consecutive year—an accomplishment only a small percentage of nonprofits achieve, and one that is directly linked to the diligent work of Fidelco's support staff. 



“Why did we want to raise guide dogs? Robbie and I had a friend whose son was blind. When he received a guide dog, we watched as that amazing animal changed not only the boy’s life, but the lives of those around him.”

—Charlie Kaman

Fidelco

Fidelco Fall Fest

Celebrating 60 years of partnering German Shepherd guide dogs with people who are blind.

Sunday October 4, 2020

Let's celebrate! There's something for everyone. This fun-filled day includes an open house, children's activities, food trucks, beer tasting, car show, motorcycle ride, and a walk/run.

9:00am – 3:00pm Bloomfield, CT

Register today at Fidelco.org



Scan to learn more.

Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation, Inc.

103 Vision Way
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27 Cannon Road
Wilton, CT 06897

Fidelco.org

Their success starts with you.

Help create partnerships
that transform lives.

Please donate
today at Fidelco.org

