

Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation, Inc.

103 Vision Way
Bloomfield, CT 06002

27 Cannon Road
Wilton, CT 06897

Fidelco.org



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FidelcoNews

Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation

Fall 2020

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If there is one word which defines the past months at Fidelco, it is continuity.

The life cycle is uninterrupted with puppies arriving, young dogs in training, and fully trained guides ready to be placed as travel becomes safer. By the time this newsletter arrives, we will have placed four new dogs with their partners. The entire organization is delighted at this evidence that our mission continues, and we can help to provide safety, independence, and mobility for people who are blind.

Along with many nonprofit organizations, we have seen a significant drop in contributions. This is completely understandable, and we share the worldwide concern that the pandemic and associated crises have caused.

Despite difficult conditions, we are as determined as ever to fulfill our life-changing mission. Whether it's relocating operations to another part of our facility when the pup house was damaged during a recent hurricane, caring for an entire litter of puppies at home to continue the training cycle, or relocating to home offices to ensure appropriate social distancing—we are up for the challenge!

Continuity.

We need your help. Please consider contributing to Fidelco, whether in volunteer activities or financial support. On our website, you'll find new podcasts from our clients who speak of the change in their lives with Fidelco guide dogs by their sides—safety, independence, mobility, and the love of our magnificent German Shepherd guide dogs.

Stay safe and well!

The Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation Staff

Continuing the mission during COVID-19.

Since March 17, 2020, staff has been 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.

A meaningful decision

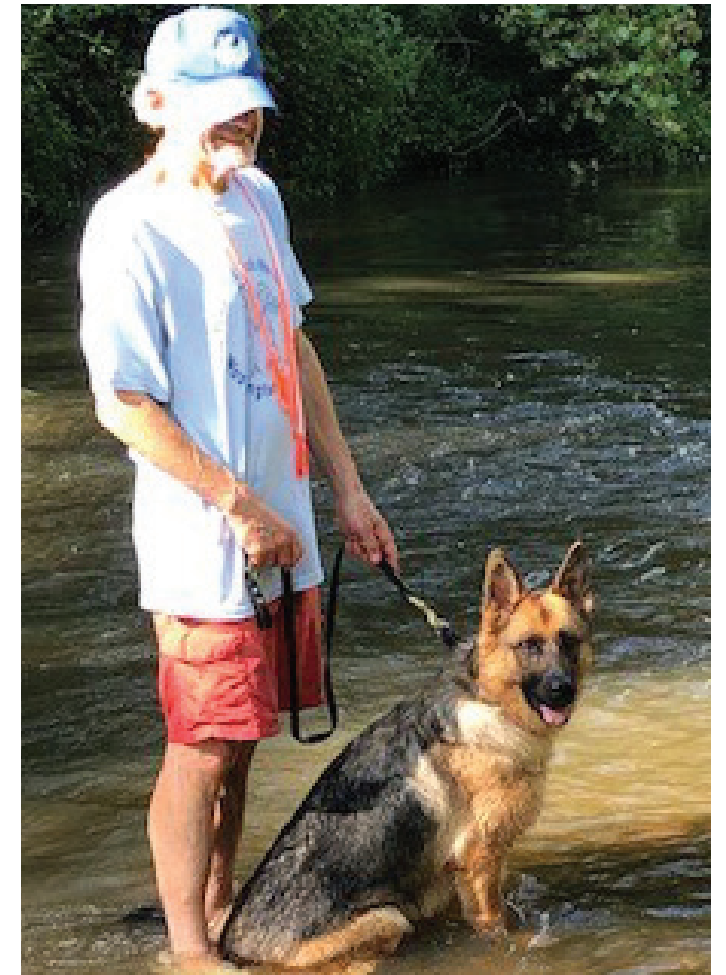
He is a jurist on the second most powerful court in the country, a lifelong advocate for civil rights and educational equality, and the proud one-year partner of Fidelco guide dog "Vixen."

The Honorable David S. Tatel sits on the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. He was appointed to the Court in 1994 by President Clinton, filling the seat previously held by Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. He is the first person who is blind to assume this position. A Maryland native, David began to lose his sight from retinitis pigmentosa after graduating from law school in 1966.

While David originally intended to become a scientist, his career path changed to one of public service after spending two summers working in the Kennedy Administration while an undergraduate. David says his advocacy for civil rights and educational equality resulted from two formative experiences: his appointment, early in his law career, as an investigator on the Chicago mayor's Riot Study Committee probing the causes of the riots following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King and a keen interest in his wife Edie's work as a teacher in Chicago's South Side public schools.

After law school, David joined a prominent Chicago law firm where he also provided pro bono support to the Chicago Urban League. In 1968, he was assigned to the Riot Study Committee, and the following year, he became founding Director of the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law which facilitated pro bono partnerships between prominent law firms and community groups to pursue civil rights work.

Returning to the East Coast in the early 1970s, David directed the National Committee for Civil Rights Under Law in Washington, D.C., and in 1977, he became the Carter Administration's Director of the Office of Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. As a senior partner

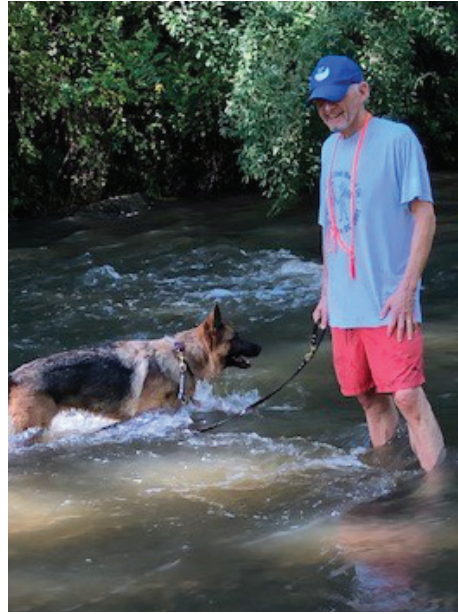


in a D.C. law firm, David founded and directed the firm's education law practice which provided legal counsel to colleges, universities, education associations, and school districts across the country with a focus on representing urban school districts creating school desegregation plans.

While he considered getting a guide dog for many years, David was successful with white cane travel and under the impression he would have to travel to a residential facility for training—something he couldn't do due to his work schedule. It wasn't until a couple of years ago that one of his young grandsons shared a podcast about a guide dog training program that would consider training clients in their home communities. David and Edie conferred about this prospect and decided to pursue it. They met with friends who answered their questions about Fidelco Guide Dogs, spoke with other Fidelco clients, and ultimately chose to apply to Fidelco. *(Continued on next page)*


A meaningful decision (continued)

While he has enjoyed a rich and fulfilling life (including running marathons and skiing), David and Edie credit Vixen with giving David back the independence he had gradually lost. Edie states, "Vixen has changed our lives in so many wonderful ways. We both have so much new independence and deep joy because of her. What she's given David is amazing. Off they go to the courthouse or on walks together, sometimes just to the mailbox or around the block, but often for many miles and many hours. He hasn't had this kind of autonomy for 45 years." David relishes his new-found opportunity to spend time on his own with Vixen as his walking companion. He



enthusiastically says, "It's a liberating experience." David and Edie marvel at Vixen's skills as a guide dog, ably guiding him through Washington Metro stations and traffic and familiarizing herself with frequently visited office buildings. They also note that once out of harness, Vixen is a wonderful pet.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, David and Edie are living in rural Virginia where Vixen is enjoying country life—going for long walks, running more freely, barking at groundhogs, and her favorite

pastime, chasing sticks. But the Tatels know that whenever Vixen is back in-harness, she will be the hard-working Fidelco guide dog they rely upon. 



Suburban Subaru

While so much has changed this year, one thing that has not is Suburban Subaru's support of our mission.

For the eighth year in a row, Fidelco was selected as Suburban Subaru's hometown charity and received a gift of nearly \$80,000. "While there are many great charities, the tireless dedication and work of Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation sets it apart. Their special breed of German Shepherd guide dogs provides immediate independence, positively changing

the lives of people who are blind," says Peter Krause, Suburban Subaru President.

From November 2020–January 2021 (please visit <https://www.subaru.com/share-the-love.html> for exact dates when they become available), please designate Fidelco Guide Dogs to receive a \$250 donation from Subaru of America, Inc.

No slowing down

"I don't know what I'd do without him—it's a perfect match." That's how Melissa ("Missy"), a Pennsylvania resident, describes her relationship with "Bordley," the successor Fidelco guide dog she received in early March 2020. Missy's beloved first guide dog, "Grady," had passed away suddenly just a few weeks earlier, and she missed him desperately. But Missy made the leap, and Bordley is now a well-established member of the family, loved by her husband and two daughters, ages three and 10.

Missy began experiencing vision loss as a freshman in high school and was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, losing all vision in 2006. Though she knew she wanted a German Shepherd guide dog when her vision began to deteriorate, Missy's journey toward partnering with her first Fidelco guide dog in 2009 was undertaken with great care. She was determined to first perfect her orientation and mobility skills and research the many guide dog programs that were available. Her decision to select Fidelco Guide Dogs became clear when an acquaintance was placed with a Fidelco guide dog, and she saw, first-hand, the difference the dog made in her life.

Missy is a Duquesne University graduate and works at a nearby community college where she "wears many hats." She began her career in 2008 as a tutor and is now a Pathways Advisor for students, some of whom are former members of the military, helping them to adjust to college life and pursue their academic and professional goals. Missy chose to work with these students because her husband, Jay, is active in the Army Reserves. In addition to her work as an advisor, Missy also coordinates one of the college's academic support



programs and teaches part-time.

Missy says, "I'm so grateful to Fidelco for partnering me with my amazing guide dogs. My guide dogs have helped me to travel more quickly and confidently, and I truly appreciate the companionship they provide." 



Full house

Like so many organizations in the United States and around the world, Fidelco quickly transitioned to remote operations in mid-March as the COVID-19 crisis mounted. Within 48 hours, every one of the 50 dogs in the kennel was welcomed into the home of a staff member, Puppy Raiser, or puppy sitter.

Fidelco Trainer/Instructor Nate Lavigueur is one of these staff members. Guide dog-in-training, "Indra," puppy-in-training, "X-Val," pet dog, "Boo," and Nate's baby daughter, Sylvia, became an inseparable crew in the Lavigueur home. "Controlled chaos" could be used to describe the situation, but the benefit to each in Nate's charge was undeniable. "When you have three dogs and a baby underfoot, everything has to be done as a group, with everyone on the same schedule. They ate together, walked the neighborhood together, explored and learned together. There are many parallels between raising an 8-month-old baby and a puppy, in particular."



For guide dogs-in-training, the benefit of reduced kennel stress coupled with constant interaction from the trainer created a successful, well-rounded guide dog. Indra was placed with a client in Albany in late August. "Obedience became a really important—perhaps the most important—skill to refine in this home environment with so much going on, says Nate. "On rainy days when it was hard to go outdoors, I found the dog version of 'planking' became a wonderful way to take the edge off. X-Val loved perching on an empty bucket or pedestal. All the trainers had to get pretty creative and it worked."

X-Val is just emerging from "pup adolescence" which takes place from approximately 6–8 months

of age. She had the advantage of observing Indra's influence as a dog in the formal stage of guide dog training to learn important behaviors. Nate's young daughter, Sylvia, became great buddies with her three canine friends and is definitely not afraid of big dogs.

Long before Nate took on this challenge, he attended Fidelco's annual Open House in May 2015. Nate grew up around the corner from the Bloomfield campus, so he was familiar with the organization. After earning a business degree from the University of Central Florida, Nate returned to Connecticut and learned of an open kennel staff position. He was hired for that position and



was immediately struck by the intelligence of the German Shepherds in his care. Nate began wondering about the clients who would one day receive these dogs as their partners. He was motivated to apply for an apprentice position within the training department. Like all apprentices, Nate's apprenticeship involved studying under multiple trainers for three years and culminated in an intensive double placement, followed by written and oral panel examinations.

Fidelco Trainers like Nate are dedicated to creating pathways for success for dogs at every age and stage to reach their full potential to become the best possible partners for our clients. Even in this time of uncertainty, Fidelco staff is rising to the occasion in countless ways. We are confident we will be able to meet the needs of current and future clients because of this spirit of making an "impossible" mission possible. 🐾



Fidelco Podcast

In partnership with iHeart Radio, Fidelco has launched a new monthly podcast series featuring the stories of our remarkable clients. Listeners can learn more than ever about their uniquely powerful human-canine bond, a day in their lives, and who they are as people.

<https://fidelco.org/podcast/>



Scan to listen.

Right at home

When Fidelco Volunteer Puppy Raiser Instructor Wendy Davis brought home the D-29 litter of eight 4½-week-old puppies in February, she had no idea of how the world was about to change. As a longtime Fidelco staff member in the Puppy Department and experienced Golden Retriever breeder and show handler, Wendy knows a thing or two about puppies.

Before the disruption of COVID-19, Wendy had offered to take litters of puppies to her home to give the Pup House staff a much-needed break. "I'm completely set up to take on a litter of puppies. I have all the equipment and the dogs benefit greatly from the presence of my pet Golden Retrievers as they grow. I live in the woods and the sights and sounds they love to investigate help with their early training," says Wendy. Wendy brought home some toys from the Pup House to get the puppies acclimated to their new home, and within just a few days—to Wendy's delight—they learned to use the bathroom area. As the weather improved, so did outdoor activities. Some of the pups' favorite activities were running in the grass and along the dirt driveway, learning to climb




Wendy with the D-litter's mom, "Yahtzee."

stone stairs, chasing Wendy's Golden Retrievers, and watching her husband move his boat.

The D-29 litter is the result of a first-ever collaboration with Guiding Eyes for the Blind in New York. This is a significant step in continuing to improve the German Shepherd Dog breed. Fidelco has always worked to increase the work ethic, intelligence, and stamina of its dogs and is known for a high success rate in placements and longevity of service. Genetic diversity is key in contributing to enhance the breed. We will learn how sharing bloodlines from other guide dog schools enhances and improves the health and performance of Fidelco's breed colony and contributes our knowledge to other schools who breed German Shepherd dogs.

Of the eight puppies in the D-29 litter, seven have entered the guide dog training program. They are now six months old and have had their third evaluation walk.

Half the pups are being raised by repeat volunteer Puppy Raisers and the other half are being raised by new Puppy Raisers. We are excited to continue following their journeys as they prepare to become trusted guide dogs for people who are blind. 



The Shepherd Club—Monthly Giving

By joining The Shepherd Club, Fidelco's monthly giving program, you'll make a world of difference to our clients and dogs. You'll also receive access to special content, including our "puppy cam," quarterly updates, and recognition in future issues of this newsletter!

Monthly giving through The Shepherd Club provides reliable and sustaining support that enables Fidelco to breed, raise, train, and place German Shepherd guide dogs for years to come with people who are blind.

- Make a difference in 2020 (and beyond) for \$20.20 per month.

- Celebrate our 60th anniversary (and beyond) for \$60 per month.
- Become a "Leader of the Pack" for \$100 per month.
- Or donate at a level that works for your budget—every donation goes a long way.

Sign up online at <http://events.fidelco.org/shepherd-club> for easy automatic credit card payments on our secure server!

To learn more, contact Mark McGrath, Philanthropic Relationship Director
e: mmcgrath@fidelco.org | t: 959.282.2181

Off to college

In the summer before Marion Yingling's senior year of high school, a flyer from Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation arrived in her family's mailbox. After learning more about Fidelco's mission and observing Puppy Raiser classes at the Wilton campus, Marion knew she wanted to become a Volunteer Puppy Raiser.

Marion and her family soon welcomed Fidelco puppy, "Tink," into their home. Marion took on the responsibility of raising Tink and teaching her good manners. After Tink returned to Fidelco's Bloomfield campus for formal guide training, it was decided that the best role for Tink would be as a career-change dog, and she was reunited with the Yinglings as a pet. Now three years old, Tink accompanies Marion and her parents out in the community, serving as a Fidelco ambassador and raising awareness of the mission. *(Continued on next page)*



Marion and "Griffin"

Off to college (continued)

After high school, Marion's interest in the training and behavior of horses and dogs led her to enroll at the University of Kentucky (UK). Marion is in her junior year in the Equine Science and Management program. She is also a member of the Equestrian Team.

In March of 2020, UK closed its campus due to the COVID-19 pandemic and transitioned to online classes. When Marion returned to Connecticut, she heard that Fidelco was looking for Volunteer Puppy Raisers, and she was eager to help. In June, Marion brought Fidelco pup, "Griffin," into the Yingling home.

In July, Marion and Griffin began attending the weekly virtual puppy classes taught by Fidelco Puppy Raiser instructor Gianna Panullo. As the summer days were passing and Griffin was thriving under Marion's care—and with

Marion scheduled to return to college in August—Gianna began working diligently to research the possibility of Marion raising and training Griffin in Kentucky.

Gianna contacted the university to inquire about a student fostering a Fidelco pup on



campus. Local veterinarians and vet hospital contacts were secured for Griffin's care and vaccinations. After all preparations were made to ensure Fidelco's and the university's health, safety,

"Initially, I came to Fidelco for the puppies. I quickly experienced how super smart and hardworking Fidelco German Shepherd guide dogs are."

and housing requirements were met, permission was granted for Griffin to live with Marion on campus.

The fall semester is currently underway, and Marion and Griffin are settled in their university home. Griffin

has already made a name for himself on campus. Marion says, "Griffin likes to meet everyone, and everyone loves him." Marion and Griffin attend virtual training classes every week, and Fidelco continues to monitor Griffin's progress in Kentucky.

At college, Marion is exposing Griffin to a variety of sights, sounds, and experiences that provide real-world opportunities for his training and socialization. There are busy crosswalks, parking lots, elevators, automatic doors, stairs, dogs, horses, bikes, and frisbees.

Marion shares that Griffin has easily adapted, from the 2-day car trip to Kentucky with a hotel stay in between, to moving in to campus housing with Marion's three roommates and a service dog being raised by one roommate, to nearby construction, alarms, and people and vehicles coming and going.

Marion proudly says Griffin is "unfazed and calm." Thanks to Marion's dedication to her pup's care and training, Griffin is already demonstrating the essential traits and temperament to become a trusted guide dog partner for a person who is blind. 

Exciting things ahead

Fidelco Guide Dogs feature events

Announcing a first-ever Fidelco event

We're excited to invite you to

Vision for the Holidays: A Virtual Fine Goods Auction

Just in time for the holidays, from **November 25th–30th**, you'll have the opportunity to bid on unique, high-end items with all proceeds going directly to our mission, which transforms the lives of Fidelco clients.

To learn more, visit <https://fidelco.org/vision-for-the-holidays-2020/>



Find more upcoming events

Fidelco Guide Dogs is excited to present several unique events that members of our Fidelco family are sure to love. These will be in addition to our first-ever Vision for the Holidays: A Virtual Fine Goods Auction, held November 25th–30th.

Make sure to visit <https://Fidelco.org/fidelco-upcoming-events> regularly for details.