

Spring 2023

FidelcoNews

Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation



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A Day in the Life of Fidelco Clients

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"Zoro"

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Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation, Inc.



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Fidelco's story, with dogs from all stages of life, was on display in mid-April as Suburban Subaru in Manchester, CT, honored us with their "Share the Love" contribution. There were little puppies falling asleep, a beautiful young dog nurtured by his puppy raiser family and now ready for guide dog training, and a fully trained guide dog doing his best to ignore the antics of the younger dogs.

Naturally they all stole the show.

We were there to thank the amazing people of Suburban Subaru for their generosity and their deep belief in Fidelco's mission. They have supported us for ten years! In addition to financial support, staff members raise puppies, and they provide vehicles and maintenance to transport our people and dogs safely. We are so grateful for them and for all the volunteers, donors and staff who make it possible to raise Fidelco German Shepherd guide dogs and place them with people who are blind.

Going into an early summer this year, the dogs are shedding their fur at lightning speed. We could make a couple of new dogs out of it every day. Soon the wading pools will be back on the training grounds, the vehicle cooling fans and a/c units will be operating, and staff will begin the training days earlier to avoid the worst of the heat.

My darling career-change Fidelco dog, Henry, doesn't seem fazed by any temperatures. If the ground is frozen, he's rubbing his face in it and rolling around. If it's warm outside, he's under a tree, surveying the scene and likely hoping a rabbit or deer will appear.

Fidelco guide dogs are working with their life partners throughout the United States and Canada in all weather, in urban and rural environments, on trains and planes, and in offices and homes.

Your generosity makes this possible. We continue to recover from pandemic-related funding decreases and are so grateful for your support.

Stay well and safe,

Karen C. Tripp
Chief Executive Officer

A Bond of Trust: Quinn Howard

One year after receiving his guide dog, "Yuri," Quinn Howard's life has changed in many ways. "Having Yuri has been my life. I'm a social person. Being part of my community is important. When Yuri and I are out together, people include me in the conversation," Quinn says.

Quinn became interested in Fidelco after meeting Fidelco clients Jessica Beecham and James Brown at National Federation of the Blind gatherings. "Jessica was one of the first people I met who had a Fidelco German Shepherd guide dog. I watched Jessica interact with 'Pippin.' James let me ask all sorts of questions about his guide dog experience and Fidelco's mission to train and place German Shepherds as guide dogs. It piqued my interest."

Quinn's partnership with Yuri reflects his determination to work through his fear of dogs which began when he was a child. "I grew up in an environment where dogs were trained to be aggressors," Quinn shares. As Quinn got older, he began to observe pet dogs that were not aggressive. He also noticed guide dogs helping people who are blind navigate their daily lives.

Quinn has retinitis pigmentosa. He has lost the vision in his left eye and has minimal central vision in his right eye. "I don't have peripheral vision. When I would hear a dog bark, I would jump out of my shoes. I was scared to touch dogs. I would tense up. But I really wanted to challenge myself, to face my fears and pursue the application process for a Fidelco guide dog."

"I have been a white cane user my whole life. People avoided me when I was using my cane, because they wanted to be careful to stay out of



Quinn and "Yuri"

my way. I didn't use a cane much in high school as I didn't want to be seen as just 'that blind guy.'

In college, people would step around me or walk on the grass until they passed me. These experiences pushed me toward my decision to apply to Fidelco in my senior year of college."

In initial conversations with Fidelco, Quinn shared his concerns and fears. "I wanted to

be honest. They said with my lifestyle and activity level, it sounded like a guide dog would be a good fit and Fidelco could work with me to help me through my anxiety. But there was no pressure if it didn't work out."

In 2021, after completing the application and evaluation process, Quinn received a call from Fidelco Trainer and Placement Specialist Chris Eastwood telling him a guide dog was ready



**Having Yuri has been
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for him. "Chris and I discussed my worries and after several conversations with Chris, I knew I was ready for Yuri."

One reason Quinn chose Fidelco was the In-Community Placement model. Individualized training of new client/guide dog teams is provided in clients' homes, workplaces, and communities. "This was huge for me as I cannot be away from work for weeks of training. I also chose Fidelco because they dedicate so much care to match the right dog with the right person, getting to know each person's individual needs, personality, and lifestyle."

"When Chris brought Yuri on the first day of placement training, it was exciting but exhausting and mentally draining. I had to get used to petting Yuri, working on commands with him, and feeding him." Over the next two weeks, Quinn became more comfortable. "As I was exposed to different situations with Yuri, I gained confidence applying the skills we had worked on."

One of Quinn's biggest challenges was giving Yuri treats, because Quinn was nervous putting his hand near a dog's mouth. "One day it was 23 degrees outside, and I had my winter gloves. Chris noticed I was more comfortable giving Yuri a treat with my gloves on, so he told me where I could buy training gloves. I ordered them that night. Chris was patient and helped me through these challenges."



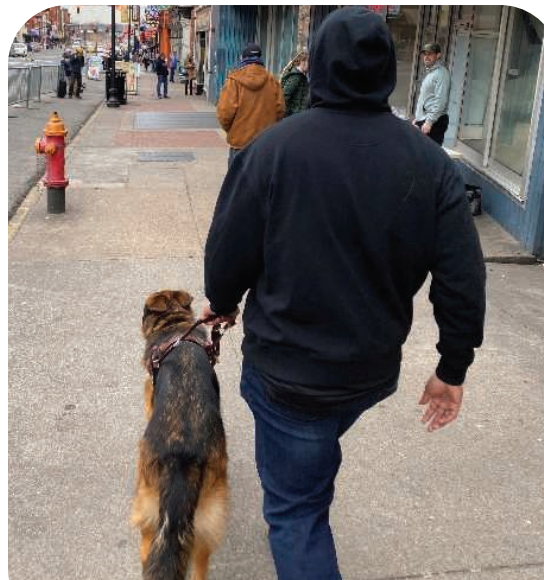
Quinn describes the "light bulb moment" when he realized he had a bond of trust with Yuri. In the second week of placement training, the team was in a busy entertainment district in Nashville, Tennessee. "It was crowded with people everywhere, but Yuri and I moved along. Chris told me Yuri had safely guided me around obstacles including five scooters people had left in random

places along the sidewalk. I said, 'What? No way!'

"In that moment, I realized with Yuri, the wall I had built up around my fear of dogs had come down. I felt so comfortable. And that feeling of trust and confidence has continued."

After graduating from college, Quinn was hired as a Vocational Counselor with the Tennessee Department of Human Services. He was promoted to his current position of Field Supervisor and

is responsible for hiring and training counselors to connect people with vision loss with services that help them live with greater independence. Yuri accompanies Quinn on the 90-minute commute by bus to Quinn's Nashville office. The team also frequently travels throughout Middle Tennessee for Quinn's job.



Quinn and "Yuri"

"Yuri helps me to go directly where I need to be. We recently traveled to another city to meet with teachers and tour their school. I didn't have to feel around to figure

out where I was. I was able to say to Yuri, 'Find the door' and 'Find the stairs.' These seamless moments mean a lot to me personally and professionally."



Tribute: Steve Famiglietti

Fidelco client Steve Famiglietti passed away last November after living a meaningful and active life as an educator/advocate and adventurer.

Steve was committed to improving the lives of people with vision impairment through his work and volunteer activities. For more than 17 years, he was the Blind Services Vocational Manager at Oak Hill—an organization serving people with disabilities in Hartford, CT. Steve provided training in the latest assistive technology tools to people with vision impairment and to their family members and educators. He developed a semester-long college-level course to teach students with disabilities how to create digital content so they could transform this skill into full-time employment as Digital Accessibility Specialists. In recognition of his many years of service to people who are visually impaired, Steve was inducted in 2018 into the Susan Daniels Disability Mentoring Hall of Fame in Massachusetts.

As the Oak Hill representative, Steve performed for many years at the CRIS (CT Radio Information System) annual "Dancing in the Dark" fundraising event to support radio reading for those who are visually impaired in CT. He was also the co-facilitator of "Harness Up Bonds and Buddies," a support group for guide dog handlers and puppy raisers formed in 2011.

Steve graduated with a degree in communications from Western CT State University. He was also interested in weather and meteorology. Encouraged by his roommate, a meteorologist, Steve was introduced to tornado chasing which became a passion for him. Over many years, Steve participated in 22 chases throughout the United

States as a member of a storm chasing group, and he relished the new people he met from across the world who became part of his large network of friends.

Steve Famiglietti accomplished and contributed so much, and he is deeply missed. 🐕



Steve Famiglietti with "Elvis"

In Their Own Words: *Fidelco Client Stories* Podcast

Get to know Fidelco's remarkable clients by listening to our monthly podcast series, *Client Stories*. iHeart Radio's Renee DiNino speaks candidly with Fidelco guide dog users about everything from the ways having a guide dog has enhanced their lives to their varied interests, occupations, and dreams.



To listen to the current podcast and to hear inspiring past recordings, scan the QR code.

"For as much as my guide dogs have given me freedom by keeping me safe, they have given me a whole new orientation to life. I've made friends that have lasted nearly a decade because of the interactions I've had when asked about my guide dogs."



Maggie Austen with "Gus"



Maggie and "Bella" at Maggie's graduation from law school.



Tamer Mourad with "Utah"

Fidelco VP, Director of Guide Dog Training Operations appointed committee member of the International Guide Dog Federation.

Congratulations to Tamer (Tommy) Mourad, Vice President, Director of Guide Dog Training Operations, on his recent appointment as a committee member of the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF). The IGDF oversees the standards of guide dog training around the world. Accreditation by the organization signifies adherence to the highest standards in the industry.

Tommy will join the Accreditation Committee which works with 97 member organizations in 35 countries.

"I am passionate about both dogs and people and am honored to be part of such a life-changing industry. Being a member of the IGDF Accreditation Committee will allow me to share this passion and

find ways for schools to collaborate and improve the quality of guide dogs in every aspect."

Prior to joining Fidelco in 2003, Tommy was a member of an elite Egyptian Military Police K9 Unit working as an explosives detection dog handler where he provided security for Egypt's leadership and visiting heads of state. 



I am passionate about both dogs and people and am honored to be part of such a life-changing industry."



Yehia D. and “Vader”

Vader joins Yehia on three-mile walks around the lake in his community and downtown for shopping and errands. While Yehia is working with tools in his garage, Vader is there by his side. Vader is an established member of their active household with Yehia and his wife, their two college-aged children, Yehia's parents, and two cats.



Sean M. and “Xavier”

With Xavier, Sean is fulfilling his love of travel with recent trips to San Diego, Las Vegas, and Park City. Closer to home, you can catch the team on their daily walks to the gym, where Xavier is the mascot—or enjoying time with Sean's wife, Susan, and their grandchildren.

A Day in the Life



Kody K. and “Corey”

Kody is an award-winning author of young adult books and New York City resident who is currently matched with guide dog Corey. Kody and Corey cross busy streets and navigate through throngs of pedestrian traffic. They ride the bus and take the subway and travel the world with Corey always safely leading the way.



Holly B. and “Teagan”

Holly lives in New York City with her family, comprised of her husband and two young daughters. She is an interfaith minister and professor of disability studies and civic engagement. Teagan helps Holly to navigate her busy schedule and maintain her independence as a busy mom and advocate for people with disabilities.

of Fidelco Clients



Karina Diaz with "Gemini"

| Volunteer Story: Karina Diaz

Seventeen-year-old Karina Diaz is raising "Gemini," her second Fidelco dog. "Scout," the first dog Karina raised for Fidelco, is now progressing well through training and on his way to changing the life of a person who is blind.

"I'd been looking into becoming a Puppy Raiser for a long time. Of course, my mom wanted to make sure she wouldn't be taking on most of the responsibility, so I waited a little while. I got Scout right after I turned 16 and that experience was so incredible that I'm now doing it again with Gemini."

Before Karina became a Puppy Raiser, Fidelco was a topic of conversation in her New Britain, CT school as one of her teachers was a puppy sitter. Karina's interest in guide dog training inspired her to take on the challenge of raising a Fidelco puppy, but what she's learned through the experience is more than anything she could have anticipated.

"I think the moment it really came full circle was when I attended Fidelco's Octoberfest event this past fall. Meeting clients who were matched with guide dogs like the ones I'm helping to raise was so powerful. Having this perspective makes it easier for me to say goodbye when they have to move on to the next phase of their training."




Meeting clients who were matched with guide dogs like the ones I'm helping to raise was so powerful."

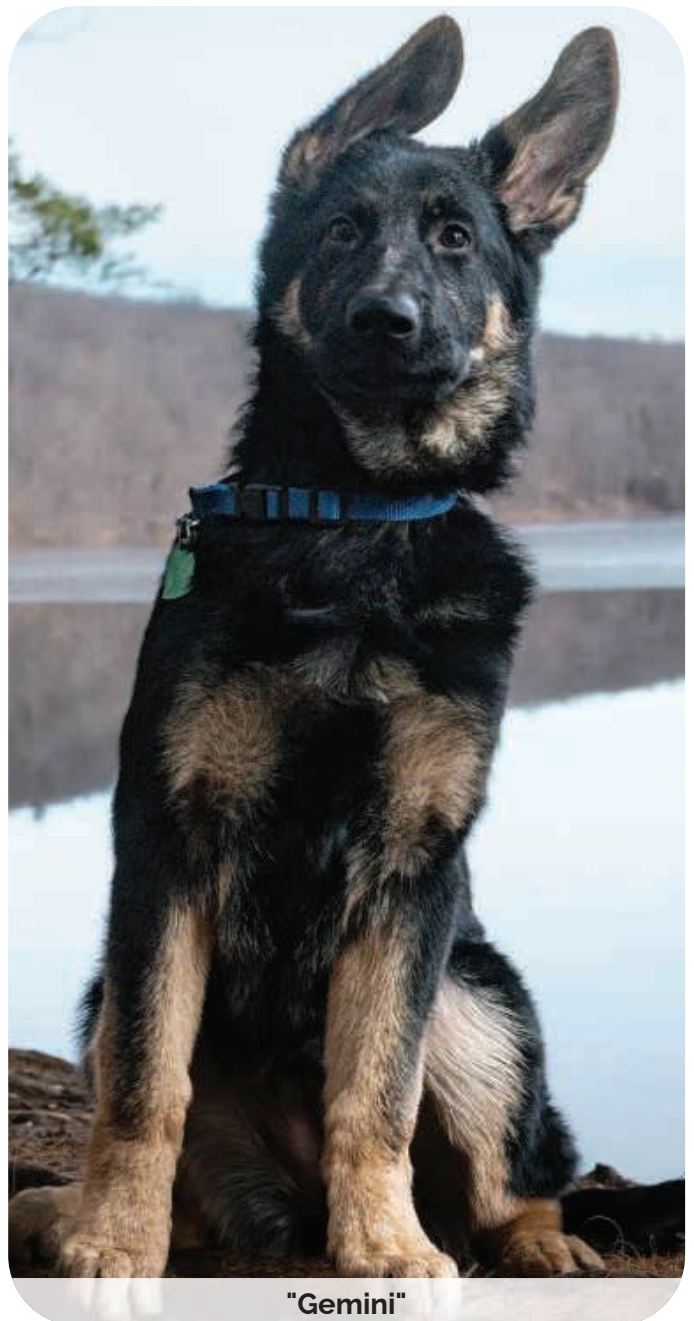
Fidelco Puppy Raisers take 8-week-old pups and provide the love, care, and early training needed to set them on a path to becoming trusted guide dogs for our clients. At 14 to 16 months old, the dogs return to Fidelco to receive formal guide dog training.

Despite the involvement of her school's students and staff with Fidelco, Karina received some initial pushback when she inquired with the school administration about bringing Scout to class. Though the principal understood that people with disabilities and their service dogs have full public access, he was not aware that dogs-in-training (in this case, Scout, who had earned his "red vest" after his successful first evaluation walk) share such access.

"Though I was frustrated initially, I realized it was a great learning opportunity for not only the school

administration, but the whole school community. Fidelco staff members spoke directly with the school as well, which created a great dialogue and deepened their understanding. My principal became one of Scout's and Gemini's biggest fans and now a teacher at my school is raising Fidelco pup, 'Brickley.'"

Karina is now a senior in high school and plans to attend one of the nursing schools near her home when she graduates. "I've learned so much from being a Puppy Raiser," she says. "It's become a passion. This experience will stay with me." 



"Gemini"

The Shepherd Club: Exclusive Access to Fidelco's Kennel Cam!

When you become a monthly donor, you also become a member of Fidelco's Shepherd Club! Your support in any amount helps to ensure Fidelco's sustainability and grants you access to special member perks such as:

- Exclusive access to the "Kennel Cam." Watch puppies and dogs as they play, train, learn, and grow in Fidelco's Pup House, Kennel, and enrichment areas.
- Quarterly updates detailing how your donations are making a difference.
- Recognition in *FidelcoNews*, our widely distributed newsletter.
- Fun Shepherd Club stickers featuring Fidelco pups and dogs—for you to show or share.

Whether it's \$10, \$100, or more, your monthly support makes possible the incredible guide dog partnerships like those you've read about in this newsletter.

To learn more about how you can become part of The Shepherd Club "pack," contact: Mark McGrath, Philanthropic Relationship Director
e: mmcgrath@fidelco.org | t: 959.282.2181



Scan to visit The Shepherd Club's Wall of Monthly Donors.





SATURDAY DOG DAYS

Family Program

July 15th, 22nd, & 29th
9:00am—1:00pm



Learn

Parents and children will learn about Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation, blindness, and the training process of our German Shepherd Dogs.



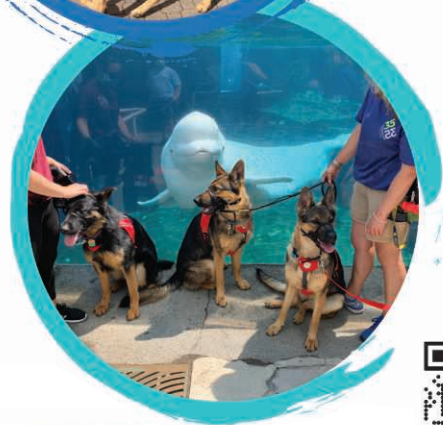
Experience

Hands-on activities making dog treats or toys, take a tour of our campus, visit our kennel and training center, and end the day with a blindfold lunch.



Register


\$119 for a parent and child, additional participants \$45 each. Sign up at fidelco.org/dogdays



Pledging to make a legacy gift is one of the most significant ways you can help to guarantee Fidelco's long-term sustainability while providing measurable financial benefits to you and your loved ones.

Your legacy can become part of Fidelco's future when you name us in your will, create a charitable gift annuity or charitable remainder trust.

To make things easier, we've partnered with FreeWill, an online tool to help you write your legal will in 20 minutes for free. Creating a will is one of the most impactful ways to care for the people and causes you love. If you choose, you can include a gift to Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation. Visit freewill.com to get started today.

Legacy gifts may reduce estate tax and can be a percentage of your estate or a particular dollar amount. Please be sure to speak with your tax professional. 



Louis Fox with "Tango"



To learn more about how your legacy gift can make a lasting impact, scan the QR code.

For more information, contact:
Richard Pummell, Vice President
e: rpummell@fidelco.org | t: 203.804.3890

"I was always taught by my family that it's important to give something back. A legacy gift to Fidelco helps ensure that Fidelco remains financially strong into the future to continue its vital mission. I encourage everyone who is able to do the same. It's a good way to give significant funds to a deserving organization while also receiving a tax benefit."

—Louis Fox, Fidelco donor and member of the Vision Society



SAVE THE DATE

October 21, 2023

Join us in person for a day of family fun including food, puppies, guide dog demos, blindfold walks, and more!

fidelco.org/octoberfest23

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Fidelco.org



**Their success
starts with you.**

Help create partnerships
that transform lives.

**Please donate
today at Fidelco.org**