

Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation, Inc.

103 Vision Way
Bloomfield, CT 06002

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Spring 2024

FidelcoNews

Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation



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Something wonderful and unusual is happening this spring at Fidelco. Ten puppies, from the same litter, are coming in-for-training. Ordinarily, our German Shepherd Dogs gift us with 4-6 puppies. But, "Tori," pictured in this newsletter's "Volunteer Story," decided that 10 was the number. These healthy, thriving puppies have grown into bright, curious, and energetic young dogs and all have passed the testing to begin training as guide dogs for people who are blind.

And, eight months ago, "Noelle" also decided that 10 was a perfect number. In another 6 or 8 months, we'll be welcoming those puppies.

It's amazing and with the other puppies born just over a year ago, we will have 23 new dogs in-for-training by May.

This is a real tribute to Fidelco's staff and volunteers who spend every day ensuring the health and vitality of our dogs.

It's also a bit of a challenge for Fidelco in terms of expense and time needed to care for so many dogs. We are always so grateful for your financial support and your volunteer activities; at this very special time, we're hoping you will consider both.

Please enjoy the stories of the difference Fidelco German Shepherd guide dogs make in the lives of people who are blind.

Enjoy the spring!

With best regards,

Karen C. Tripp
Chief Executive Officer



**Forward Through the City:
Miguel Zapata and "Iron"**

Fidelco client Miguel Zapata lives in the center of Chicago with all of the commotion of a busy metropolitan area. Since he travels daily, Miguel requires a calm and confident guide dog partner. Knowing this, Fidelco trainers matched him with "Iron," who has adapted smoothly to Chicago life, remaining focused through all of the sights, sounds, and distractions.

"Iron is an unflappable traveler," Miguel says. "Whether it's a jetliner overhead, the rumble of a passing freight train, or a semi-truck powering down the avenue, Iron always keeps his cool and stays focused on his guide work."

Miguel lives with his wife and three sons. Daily life includes walking, riding the bus or train, and traveling by car, whether to the downtown business district or other destinations for personal, work, and family needs.

Miguel chose to apply to Fidelco in part because, "German Shepherd Dogs are my favorite breed, and Fidelco trains only German Shepherds." Another deciding factor was Fidelco's In-Community Placement model which provides personalized training of new guide dog teams in clients' communities. "Fidelco does in-home training, which is a big deal for me because of my commitments," Miguel said.

In January 2023, Fidelco placement specialist Chris Eastwood brought Iron to Chicago for the two-week training process. The team learned quickly together, exploring locations Miguel travels to on a daily basis. "Chris was friendly, professional and knowledgeable," Miguel says. "He showed me how to care for Iron and how we, as a team, can safely navigate the city."

"Travel before having a guide dog was somewhat limited in distance and time of day," Miguel shares. "After being teamed up with Iron, my travel and independence have increased substantially. Traveling in the dark is no longer an issue. My activity and productivity levels have certainly increased because of the longer distances we're able to travel."

Miguel values Iron's calm demeanor around crowds and children. "My youngest son has safety patrol duty before and after school. Iron and I volunteer to help out. Little kids will run

and scream and cross Iron's path, but Iron is so well behaved and gentle that he always yields to the children."




Miguel and "Iron" traveling in the city



Miguel and "Iron" riding the city bus

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After being teamed up with Iron, my travel and independence have increased substantially.

"One day while traveling, we encountered a class of preschoolers marching single file on the sidewalk. At first, I was reluctant to walk with Iron next to the kids. But then I gave him the 'forward' command. As we walked past, the kids were pointing and 'ooing' and 'aahing.' 'Look at the wolf,' some of them said and started howling like a little pack of wolves. I smiled. Iron raised his head. It made my day."

Iron's temperament and training prepared him to be the right guide dog for Miguel and his lifestyle, whether out in the city or at home. "Iron is obedient and calm and has never chewed on anything, not even as much as a shoe. For this I am grateful to his dedicated Puppy Raisers who make Iron so darn easy to love." 



Gerry and "Devyn" with Volunteer Puppy Raiser Nancy Handley at Fidelco's annual Oktoberfest event

A "Can-Do" Spirit: Gerry Leary and "Devyn"

Blind since infancy, Fidelco client Gerry Leary, a Boulder, CO resident, says he'll try everything and always had trouble with the words "no" and "can't." Gerry's determination, confidence, and entrepreneurial spirit have helped him throughout his life.

Gerry was matched with his first Fidelco guide dog, "Devyn," in 2018. A friend and Fidelco client urged him to apply, and the In-Community Placement training model "sealed the deal"—he could train and continue to work.

Gerry grew up in California and says he was lucky that his parents were supportive of his life-long

curiosity and confidence he could do everything sighted children could do. His mother taught him simple cooking when he was three or four years old because she knew he would use the stove on his own and wanted him to be safe. Recognizing Gerry's curiosity about cars, his father, an auto mechanic, began teaching him by letting him work on cars in their home garage. Like his other siblings, Gerry was expected to do household chores and participate in family sporting events.

Gerry's interest in car maintenance grew as he got older, and as a teenager he spent much of his time at a local garage. Because of the training he received from his father and his highly developed


sense of hearing, Gerry could determine when a car's noises indicated a mechanical problem and would tell the station's owner what repairs he thought were needed. Despite being told by others that a person who is blind could never become a car mechanic, Gerry was finally offered a job and worked in this field for 40 years, eventually opening his own garage in 1984.

Gerry decided to try a different career after years as a car mechanic—becoming a Master Coffee Roaster. His interest in coffee began after visiting a San Francisco café in 1994. When he couldn't secure an apprenticeship in the coffee business locally, Gerry traveled to San Francisco to train at the Coffee Training Institute and West Coast Specialty Coffee Company where he became a Master Coffee Roaster. The training was costly, and he borrowed money and refinanced his home, believing that the sacrifice would ultimately be worth it. After returning home, Gerry began roasting with a tiny roaster in a shed in his back yard. Despite the inherent challenge of not being able to see the coffee beans he selected nor the roasting process, he worked diligently, creating a log of each roasting trial and used the sound and smell of the roasting beans to perfect his craft.

After several months, Gerry began selling quarter pound bags of his coffee to friends. When no roasters would hire him, he founded his own specialty coffee roasting company in 2003 called The Unseen Bean. Gerry found commercial space, bought a large roaster, and opened a roastery and a coffee shop; the shop closed in 2019. Rebounding in 2022, Gerry partnered with two Italian coffee lovers and opened a new coffee roasting facility which sells over 20 varieties of coffee and coffee-related products to retail and wholesale customers. In addition to selling his products at the roastery, Gerry and Devyn travel to outdoor music festivals and amateur radio conventions throughout the country selling his specialty coffees.



Gerry and "Devyn"

"Devyn is wired to work and can't wait to put on her harness and get going. She's my best buddy and is involved in most of my activities, including traveling to sell my coffee. She hangs out with me at the roastery and is very sociable—she loves people, and people love her." 

In Their Own Words: Fidelco Client Stories Podcast



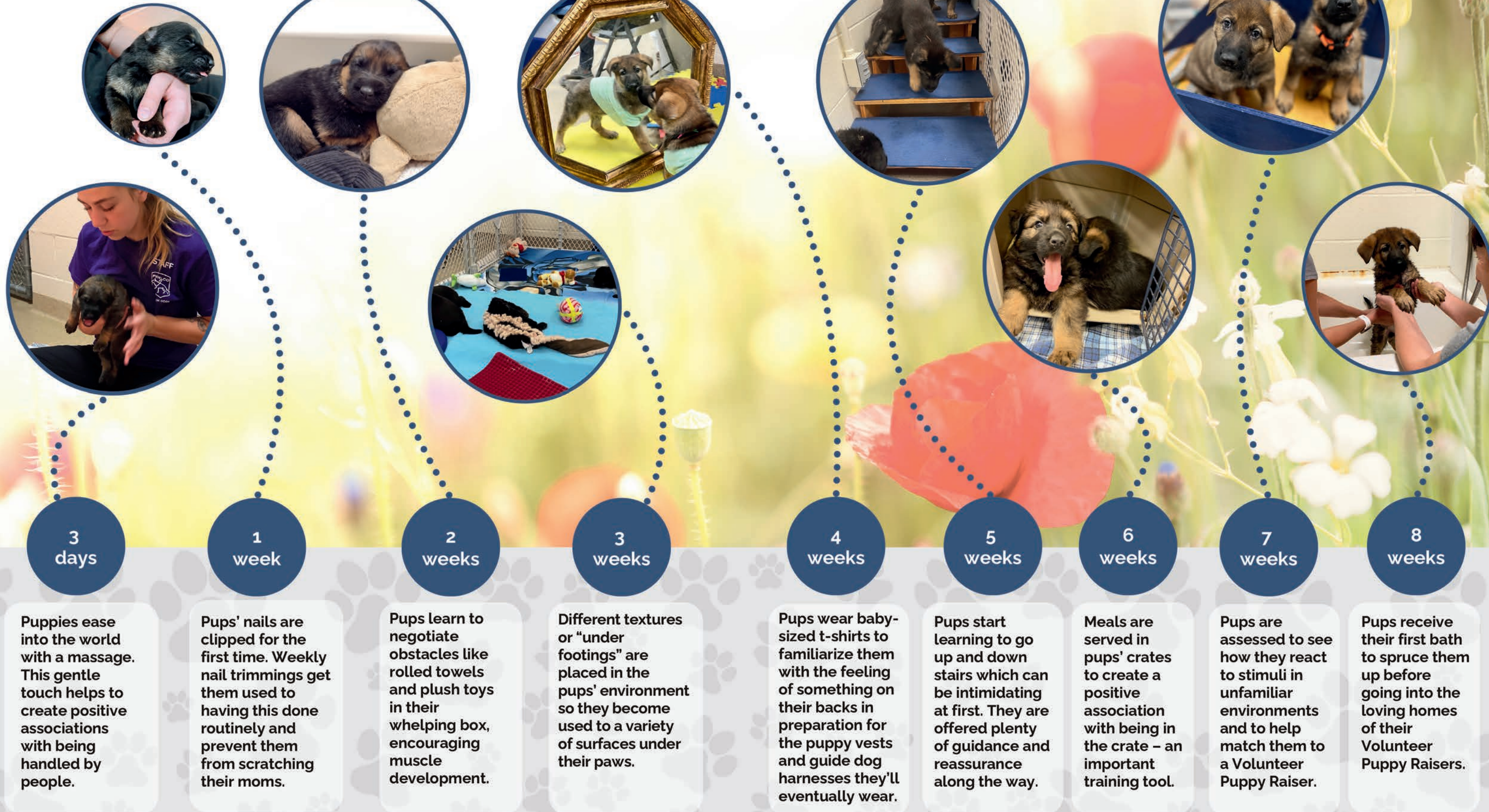
Check out Gerry's recent podcast episode with host Renee DiNino!

Our monthly podcast series in partnership with iHeart Radio, *Client Stories*, delves into the lives of our remarkable clients. Renee DiNino speaks candidly each month with a different client about their guide dog experience, interests, occupations, and dreams.



Check out videos and photos from behind the scenes of Fidelco's puppy enrichment program.

BORN WITH A PURPOSE



Q&A with Fidelco's Manager of Puppy Development, Liz DiPace



Liz and "Rebel"

Q: What is your role at Fidelco and when did you first become involved with the organization?

A: As the Manager of Puppy Development, I lead a team responsible for puppies from birth until they return to Fidelco for formal training after living with their Volunteer Puppy Raiser families.

I became involved with Fidelco at 13 years old when I was in 8th grade while raising my first puppy, "Simba." I always wanted a dog and after meeting a puppy being raised by someone in my church, I was able to talk my parents into allowing me to raise a puppy. I've been involved in several different parts of the organization, including puppy raising, kennel training, and placements.

Q: What are some of the biggest challenges you encounter in your work?

A: The challenges of the position are also some of the best parts of my job—from whelping a litter with a new mom to helping a Volunteer Puppy Raiser work through a challenge their puppy may have. These issues require a lot of support and time, but when I see that puppy making progress and improving towards its end goal of changing someone's life, it's all worth it.

Q: Is there such a thing as a "typical" day? What does that look like?

A: There is no such thing as a typical day. One day I may be in the Pup House helping a mom whelp, another day I may be in the city training a guide dog or working an event to find more volunteers. Every day is different. If our Volunteer Puppy Raisers need help with something or a puppy is having an immediate problem, our schedule changes very quickly as the support of our Volunteer Puppy Raisers is always a top priority.

Q: What is a favorite story or memory relating to your work at Fidelco?

A: Years ago, we had a graduation banquet the night before our big Walk-a-Thon. When I met the human partner of the dog I had raised at the event, my desire to be a trainer and place these dogs was solidified. Years later, I was the trainer of a dog named "Lily," and I was able to introduce Lily's human partner to her Volunteer Puppy Raiser. The gratification of that "full circle" interaction is something that will always stay with me.



Liz and "Dodge"

Q: How do volunteers support the work you and your team do?

A: Volunteers are vital to everything my team and I do, and we would not be able to do this without our Volunteer Puppy Raisers. They have become like a family to us, and we spend a lot of time with them as we want to make sure they succeed. We also have volunteers who help support and socialize our puppies starting at 3 weeks old in our Pup House.

Our Saturday class volunteers help our Vet Med Department as well as help to work our pups through different skills stations during Saturday classes. I also have several volunteers who help to recruit other volunteers by assisting them through the process or by being ambassadors out in public with their puppies. We have a small staff but rely on hundreds of volunteers to carry out our mission. 🐾

Donor Spotlight

DOOLITTLE
FAMILY FOUNDATION, INC.



"Our family foundation places a special emphasis on supporting the needs of individuals and families impacted by life-altering circumstances. We are delighted to partner with Fidelco, whose programs provide clients with the ability to move through the world independently and with confidence."

– Doolittle Family Foundation

For the past seven years the Doolittle Family Foundation has generously awarded grant funding to Fidelco. Grant support has helped provide puppy care and training supplies that keep pups safe and healthy as they learn and grow toward becoming trusted guide dogs. Puppy vet care, crates, and training toys are just some of the program needs the Foundation grants have generously supported.

We are sincerely grateful to the Doolittle Family Foundation, whose charitable giving supports increased independence for people who are blind through Fidelco guide dog partnerships. 🐾



Kim Salvas and "Hagrid"

| Volunteer Story: Kim Salvas

It's been about twenty years since volunteer **Kim Salvas raised her first puppy, "Kaleb," for Fidelco.** In the time since, Kim has raised five more Fidelco dogs. The sixth dog she raised, "Hagrid," just returned to Fidelco for formal training in March 2024.

"When I researched volunteer opportunities many years ago, I was immediately drawn to Fidelco because I wanted to make a difference in someone's life," says Kim. "At the time, the company I worked for wasn't a particularly dog-friendly place, so bringing Kaleb to the office was a 'pilot project' that quickly became an incredible experience not only for me, but for everyone I worked with. To this

day, though I no longer work for the company, many of my former colleagues still support Fidelco's mission and give generously to social media fundraisers I create on behalf of the organization."

Kim became a Breed Dog Caregiver for breed mom, "Tori," in 2021. When she raised Hagrid, it was the first time she had two Fidelco dogs—albeit on different "career paths"—at once. "I do this by myself without significant help," Kim says. "But it's gotten easier over time. It's gratifying knowing Fidelco can count on me to step in to help with many aspects of their program."

Kim has also cared for new moms and puppies in Fidelco's Pup House, helped to keep our Kennel clean, and spruced up our campus grounds with her gardening skills. "At different times in my life, I've been able to contribute in different ways. When I retired, I wanted to do more. Volunteering in the Pup House is just the best! Interacting with newborn puppies and their wonderful moms is so rewarding and fun."

All Fidelco guide dogs spend the early part of their journeys—from 8 weeks to about 18 months—in the homes of Volunteer Puppy Raisers. These devoted individuals provide the nurturing environment and socialization training pups need to become steadfast guide dog partners. In her years of puppy raising, Kim has had the opportunity to raise awareness about Fidelco through the curiosity of people drawn to the energetic pups in red vests* that are often by her side.



Kim and "Tori"



Kim with "Kaleb," the first Fidelco dog she raised



When I retired, I wanted to do more. Volunteering in the Pup House is just the best!

She reflects, "It sounds like a cliché, but Fidelco is truly like a family. The staff is so welcoming and supportive."

*A Fidelco dog earns their "red vest" following the successful completion of their first evaluation walk, officially becoming a guide dog-in-training. 🐕

To learn more about how you can support Fidelco's mission through volunteering, please visit Fidelco.org/volunteer

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 sustaining support in any amount helps to ensure Fidelco's future 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.
- Biannual 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.

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.

The Vision Society



Legacy giving is essential to Fidelco's long-term sustainability. By naming Fidelco in your will, creating a charitable gift annuity, or a charitable remainder trust, you are ensuring our mission continues while providing financial benefit to you and your loved ones.

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 significant 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.



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 rpummell@fidelco.org

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Rain date: Sunday, October 6

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