**Pine Tree Guide Dog Users Committee Reports**

February 1, 2023

**Advocacy & Legislative**

Pauline Lamontagne, Chair

Email: president@pinetreeguidedogusers.org

•             State legislation

No activity

•             Advocacy Matters section of PTGDU Monthly News Update

The following topics were included in our monthly updates:

a) November: Provided links to The greater Portland council of governments newly released Ride With Me video featuring PTGDU board member Sadie Donnell; Blind Users of Uber & Lyft Facebook group; Maine sales tax exemption for service animal handlers; and the BringFido.com website for those traveling with retired guides or pets.

b) December: Special Holiday Giving Guide edition, no advocacy information shared.

c) January: Provided links to the newly launched ADA website; and the Job Accommodation Network’s information about taking a service animal to a job interview and allergies in the workplace.

•             PTGDU Facebook page

In November, we reposted the ACB/GDUI rideshare survey info and shared a post and photo thanking Uber drivers for allowing guide dog puppies in their vehicles.  In January, we posted GDUI’s new resource for dealing with unruly pets inside stores and other public venues. One commenter shared that he had talked with management about this issue several times in the past with no success.

•             Requests for Assistance

No activity.

**Fundraising**

Christina Brino, Chair

Email: princessregal@optonline.net

The PTGDU Fundraising Team held its first Meeting on January 17, 2023 . Discussion topics included possible grant and sponsorship opportunities; fundraising events held by PTGDU; and product sales. Short term next steps include checking with the Maine Association of Nonprofits to determine what fundraising guidelines volunteer membership organizations must follow; estimated pricing for a product suggestion; and writing a grant proposal to fund our annual website expenses

**Membership**

Cheryl Peabody Chair

Email: epeabody@roadrunner.com

As of December 2022 there were thirty three members of PTGDU.

In January, thirteen members had not renewed their membership for 2023. The Membership Team has been calling, emailing and texting members to remind them to renew.

In the renewal process, a member attempting to pay dues, identified the PTGDU website PayPal and credit card link was not working. This was resolved quickly and the process of reconnecting with members to renew continued for the month. Two out of state members decided not to renew. Eight members have agreed to renew and are in the process of sending in checks or using PayPal to pay their dues. The team continues to try to connect with three of the thirteen members for information on whether they want to continue with PTGDU.

The committee will begin exploring additional efforts to reach folks who may not know about Pine Tree Guide Dog Users. Historically, there have been statewide agency meetings with the Division for the Blind (DBVI) the Iris Network and Catholic Charities Maine (CCM). This may be an opportunity for Pine Tree Guide Dog Users to have a representative on the meeting agenda to share information with all staff including: administrators, orientation and mobility specialists, vision rehabilitation therapists and teachers of the visually impaired. Maine ophthalmologists have an annual statewide meeting in the fall each year. This may be another chance to share information about PTGDU. Information is a powerful tool in so many ways for so many reasons. This allows teachers and administrators to be able to share current PTGDU information and opportunities with clients they are serving now or have known in the past.

The committee welcomes any and all ideas as we find additional ways for PTGDU to be shared with individuals and groups

**Public Relations, Publications, and Newsletter**

Ginger Kutsch, Chair

Email: news @PineTreeGuideDogUsers.org

•             Facebook

A.            Official Facebook: [www.facebook.com/PTGDU](http://www.facebook.com/PTGDU)

Summary: We currently have 147 likes, and 185 fans following our page (Men 21.50%, women 78.50%). Generally, we average 2 posts per week. During the month of December, we shared holiday-themed photos throughout the month. We’ve been encouraging members to provide photos for our page and also reaching out to guide dog schools and puppy raisers to get photos. Our top two performing Facebook post in the last 90 days were as follows:

1. It’s a match! Many thanks to our Facebook fan Suzette from Texas for sharing an update about her new guide dog. Suzette is a mother of three and an advocate for pedestrian safety in her town. She recently attended The Seeing Eye and was matched with Boden, a 75 pound German shepherd.  Suzette writes, He is such a well-mannered dog who is very eager to work and learns so quickly. He stepped right into our family just seamlessly… I can tell he's been to lots of places and been exposed to a variety of experiences.  He isn't fazed by much at all. He is just rock solid when he's in harness… He is truly a joy. Suzette also tells us that working with Boden is so smooth and when she’s at meetings or the local coffee shop, Boden’s very patient and great at just chilling under the table. Her husband and kids are “so impressed at what all he can do” and she says that when he's not in harness, he's a popular member of their dog pack and always up for playing fetch with his orange rubber donut. Congratulations Suzette and Boden, and hats off to Boden’s puppy raiser for a job well done!

Photo Description 1: German shepherd guide dog Boden with Mollie, Suzette’s Great Pyrenees, a retired Livestock Guardian Dog. The two dogs are fast friends and are practicing their Down/Rests together, with their front paws touching. Mollie is a very large dog with a long, thick white coat. Boden is slightly smaller than Mollie and his ears are perked up towards the camera.

Alt text: A guide dog and a retired Texas livestock guardian dog companionably hanging out together

Photo Description 2: Boden lying on a tile floor curled up with his orange donut between his front paws. He is looking at the camera expectantly, waiting for the next game of fetch.

2. It’s all in the eye of the beholder. Not much beats the spectacular views at the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse Park in Bristol, Maine -- but   how do those without sight enjoy such breath-taking beauty? Through the  feel of the jagged Rock formations and the cold mist from sea spray, the sound of the crashing waves and the warning cry of a herring gull, the smell of the ocean air, and  so much more.  So next time you have the chance, try closing your eyes and experiencing the remarkable beauty of our world in a whole new way.

Photo Description: A married couple with their guide dogs sitting on a granite outcropping in front of the fog house and bell tower at the park. The woman is wearing a blue puffer jacket while her black Lab stands between her and the man. The man is wearing a red jacket and his yellow Lab is resting at his feet on a lower rock.

Alt text: A couple with their Seeing Eye dogs sitting on a cliff near the ocean in Maine

B. Members & Friends Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/3044240242465295>

We currently have 56 members on our group page.

•             Outreach

PTGDU president Pauline Lamontagne was interviewed about her life with a guide dog by Anne Baldridge from News Center Maine. The story aired on November 25, 2022 and highlighted puppy raisers from Guiding Eyes for the Blind and how their work helps people who are blind. View the clip at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ns6SzeyEdYk>

On December 13, Lisa Becker, event coordinator for the Lecky Brown Senior Center in Gorham, emailed info@PineTree Guide DogUsers.org to request a speaker for her group. Sadie Donnell volunteered to show her Ride with Me video and speak to the group. On December 7, a guide dog handler from Australia emailed info@PineTreeGuideDogUsers.org to ask if he could receive copies of our Monthly News Updates and other PTGDU information by email. We added him to our distribution list.

•             Website

With Steve Lambert’s help, the recording of Kathy Nimmer’s presentation from our fall membership meeting was added to the Educational Corner page and our What’s Happening page was updated. The 2022 Monthly News Updates were also archived and can now be accessed through a link on the current Monthly News Updates page.

•             Monthly News Updates

News updates are emailed to PTGDU members, disability-nonprofits in Maine and others interested in our group. A post about each issue is pinned to the top of our Facebook page for the month and shared with our group page and other Facebook groups.  In December, we created a special holiday giving guide. In January, we received a request to reprint our yoga mat article from a California guide dog handler’s group.

**Scholarship**

Leona McKenna, Chair

We are planning to review the Patricia E. Ellis Memorial Scholarship Fund policy to possibly make changes that would invite more  applicants. The current policy, version 1.2,  includes the history, purpose, guidelines, and applicant requirements. As of the date of this report, there have been no applicants.  The deadline for the second quarter is March 01 of this year.

The American Council of the Blind Of Maine, ACBMaine, voted, unanimously, on June 02, 2022,  to make a  $1000 charitable donation to this scholarship fund.   The current balance is $1700.

**Website**

Gil Whitmore, Chair

Email: gilbertw@twc.com

The membership application form for new and renewing members has been updated. The original form was created using a plug-in call Member press.

We are now using a plug-in called Forminator. This new application form is easier to use, however, there are still some accessibility issues with it.

there is a new version of Forminator coming out in February which we hope will solve the accessibility issues.

With money approved by the board we are also planning to create a second form for renewing members only.

In other words, it will be a form for new applicants and a form for renewing members.

The form for the renewing members will be much easier to fill out they will not have to repeat information we already have.

The board has also approved money for Web development training for Steve Lambert.

This will be up to two hours of training by our current website developer.

The member press plug-in had an annual fee, and this will go away shortly.

Thus, even though it cost us for the developer to create the application  we will save money in the long run.