**Pine Tree Guide Dog Users Committee Reports**

February 7, 2024

**Advocacy & Legislative**

Pauline Lamontagne, Chair

Email: plamontagne@twc.com

•State & Federal Legislation

1. ACB Maine and PTGDU have agreed to work together on legislation concerning Mainers who are blind or low vision. Roger Fuller will serve as PTGDU’s liaison between the two organizations.
2. On behalf of PTGDU, the committee drafted and submitted comment to the U.S. Department of Transportation’s proposal regarding its Service Animal Air Transportation Form that permits airlines to collect information about passengers with service animals. At least four PTGDU members also submitted comments. PTGDU’s official comment can be found at

<https://www.regulations.gov/comment/DOT-OST-2018-0068-32533>

Docket: DOT-OST-2018-0068

Document ID: DOT-OST-2018-0068-32402

URL: https://www.regulations.gov/document/DOT-OST-2018-0068-32402

•PTGDU Monthly News Updates

The following topics were shared in the Advocacy Matters section of our monthly news updates:

November –Linked to GDUI’s emergency preparedness brochure and security screening tips about bringing food and other items in carry on or checked luggage.

January – How to get help in resolving discrimination issues at the airport, guidelines for using escorts at airports, travel survey, and Rideshare presentation by The Seeing Eye;

• PTGDU Facebook page

In the last quarter, two advocacy-related awareness posts were featured. One post shared information about detectable warning surfaces, and the other post explained the importance of keeping sidewalks clear of snow and ice

**Fundraising**

Christina Brino, Chair

Email: princessregal@optonline.net

In January, yearend acknowledgement letters were sent to donors. Cash donations for 2023 totaled $2,491.00.

**Membership**

Email: membership@PineTreeGuideDogUsers.org

-Membership count equals 26 renewals plus 3 new members. 21 out of the 28 members are current or former guide dog handlers.

-The 2024 membership roster was emailed to the Guide Dog Users, Inc. membership contact. A check for $270.00 was mailed to the GDUI treasurer.

-In December, we held an informal holiday chat via Zoom for all members. Seven members attended the event.

**Publications, Newsletter, & Website**

Ginger Kutsch, Chair

Email: news @PineTreeGuideDogUsers.org

• Facebook

-Members & Friends Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/groups/3044240242465295

We currently have 61 members on our group page.

-Official Facebook: www.facebook.com/PTGDU

We currently have 196 likes, and 265 fans following our page. Ratio is 80% women, 20% men. Generally, we average 2 posts per week. The top three performing Facebook posts in the last 90 days were as follows:

Post 1 on Nov. 15. Post Reach 3,907.

Ever wonder about those strange looking bumps on the end of the sidewalks just before you cross the street? Those bumps are “Detectable warnings” that

alert people with vision impairments of their approach to street crossings and hazardous drop-offs like the edge of a boarding platform at the rail station.

The “bumps” are set up in a distinctive surface pattern of domes that can be felt underfoot or with a white cane. Federal standards address the spacing,

height, and diameter of these truncated domes to ensure a uniform texture. They also require that detectable warning surfaces contrast visually with adjacent

walking surfaces. Photo Description: Close-up of a light-colored Yellow Lab in harness with its handler standing on a rusty red detectable warning surface.

The dog is looking directly at the camera and only the lower portion of the handler is visible.

Post 2 on Jan. 9. Post Reach 3,294.

Heartbreak. When it’s time to retire a guide dog from service, some handlers keep their retired dog as a pet. But for some, retirement means finding their beloved partner a new home. This may be due to financial limitations, housing restrictions on pets, or other barriers that make it difficult, if not impossible, to keep their retired dog. In these instances, handlers may rehome the guide dog with a family member, a friend, the guide dog school, the dog’s puppy raiser, or others who they believe will provide the best home possible. Photo Description: A smiling puppy raiser standing on a deck with a snow shovel in one hand while reaching out to pet his yellow Lab, a guide dog that he raised and adopted after the dog was retired from service. The dog is looking happily at the camera and wearing an orange collar. A huge pile of snow and snow-covered trees are visible in the background.

Post 3 on Jan. 25. Post Reach 3,235

Meet Sam, Currie & Emil! Many exceptional dogs who are not suited to guide work go on to alternative careers or are placed in loving homes as pets. Check out their stories below!

SAM

Sam, a yellow Lab golden retriever cross is now an AKC dock diving sport dog. He was released from the guide dog program due to a lack of confidence. In the photo, he’s jumping off the dock diving platform. His feet are all in the air. His ears are flopped forward and the gates are open off the dock. He's wearing a blue collar and you can tell he has already been in the water.

CURRIE

Currie, a female light-faced black and tan German shepherd, is now a blood donor for a local animal hospital. She was released from the guide dog program due to a focal raised pigmented lesion on her iris. In the photo, she’s wearing a black bandana that says “I save lives” while sitting up on a raised bed with a blue blanket on it. Behind her is a board with papers hanging and a dry erase. Next to her is a framed blackboard that reads “Donor Superhero of the day Currie. I have donated 8 times & saved 24 lives. I love I earned my one-gallon certificate! “

EMIL

Emil, a yellow Lab golden retriever cross, is now a professional couch potato and a beloved pet. He was released from the guide dog program due to noise-sensitivity. In the photo, he’s lying upside down on the couch with his front paws folded, eyes closed and his jowl pushed up from the pillow.

• Website

We have completed the first step of our website review. We asked PTGDU members and friends to review the site and offer feedback and suggestions. The overall response was extremely positive with a few suggestions for possible additions and changes. Steve Lambert was recognized for his outstanding work on maintaining and updating the site.

* Monthly News Updates

-The second annual gift giving edition was published in December.

 -A new section was introduced in the February issue. This section offers short tips on “best practices” from seasoned guide dog handlers.

-We continue to include a monthly health care tip for dogs in our community updates section.

**Public Relations**

Chair: Sadie Donnell

Email: president@pinetreeguidedogusers.org

**- PTGDU member Carolyn Bebee connected us with a current O&M Specialist working in Maine. As a result, we were able to set up a presentation via Zoom with all of the Orientation & Mobility Specialists in Maine to share information about PTGDU and to find out how we could assist in recruitment efforts to fill longtime vacancies in Maine state jobs for O&M Specialists. One of the Specialists is now a member of PTGDU and will help to keep our two groups connected.**

**A link to the Maine state O&M recruitment video was shared in the February issue of our monthly news updates. The video will also be shared on our Facebook page later this month or in early March.**

 **-A den leader for a Cub Scout pack out of Sanford reached out via our website to request a speaker. One of our members volunteered to help and gave a 40-minute presentation via Zoom.**

**-A guide dog handler reached out via email to ask for recommendations for a harness pouch. We provided three options.**

**-An older adult reached out via email to inquire about adopting retired or career change guide dogs.**