**Pine Tree Guide Dog Users Committee Reports**

May 1, 2024

**Advocacy & Legislative**

Brad Strause, Chair

* Education

The new service animal flyer was completed. The purpose of the flyer is to Help businesses recognize REAL service animals - what questions can be asked, how they can be expected to behave, when they can be excluded, and more. We are putting the final touches on the new rideshare poster and have started work on an etiquette tip sheet for healthcare providers.

•State & Federal Legislation

PTGDU submitted comment supporting the National Federation of the Blind’s petition to restore meaningful access to air travel for those of us who fly with guide dogs.

* Monthly News Updates

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

1. February - best practices for complying with the Federal Fair Housing Act; Lukas Franck's presentation about concepts and strategies for safely making street crossings; ambulances and guide dogs.
2. March - what to do if you experience problems with TSA; The Seeing Eye’s free app for iOS and Android; and links for three rideshare presentations
3. April - the inaccessibility and complexity of the U.S. Department of Transportation’s service animal form that many airlines currently require; workplace accommodations for service animals; and hotel guidelines from the ADA Frequently Asked Questions publication.

• Facebook page

In the last quarter, several advocacy-related awareness posts were featured including an announcement about our new service animal flyer; etiquette tips on assisting blind people; a link to our Educational Corner on the website; the MaineBiz.com article about the challenges faced by businesses and those with legitimate service animals.

**Fundraising**

Chair: Christina Brino

Our yearly report for the Mary T. & Curtis D. Lovill Trust Emergency Veterinary Care Fund was submitted to the trust on May 8 via email. Todd Mattson confirmed receipt of the report on May 20, 2024.

**Membership**

Email: membership@PineTreeGuideDogUsers.org

-Membership count equals 30 members. 22 out of the 30 members are current or former guide dog handlers.

**Publications, Newsletter, & Website**

Ginger Kutsch, Chair

Email: news @PineTreeGuideDogUsers.org

• Facebook

-Members & Friends Facebook: 666 members

https://www.facebook.com/groups/3044240242465295

-Official Facebook: 205 likes, 288 followers

www.facebook.com/PTGDU

Ratio is approximately 80% women, 20% men. Generally, we average 2 posts per week. The top two performing Facebook posts in the last 90 days were as follows:

Post 1 on February 28. Post Reach12,206.

Share this flyer! Help businesses recognize REAL service animals - what questions can be asked, how they can be expected to behave, when they can be excluded,

and more. Download the flyer here: https://pinetreeguidedogusers.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/PineTreeGuideDog\_Flyer-1.pdf Photos shown in flyer provided

courtesy of K9s For Warriors and The Seeing Eye Inc.

Post 2 on February 21. Post Reached 3,197.

Exposure is the key. At seven weeks of age, guide dog puppies are placed in the homes of loving families who introduce them to all aspects of the world in which they’ll eventually work: people, children, other dogs, schools, shops, buses, trains, museums, cities, and more. This early exposure prepares them for all the new experiences they’ll encounter as working dogs. Many thanks to guide dog puppy raisers! Photo Description: Four guide dog puppies riding on the train with their raisers. From front to back - Kail a 4.5-month-old tan and black German shepherd wearing a Seeing Eye bandana; Iowa, a yellow lab; Betty, a darker yellow lab and the only pup with her eyes still open; and Champ, another black and tan German shepherd. The three older pups are all wearing their green Seeing Eye vests.

* Website

We made several planned updates to the site including following best practices to only have a small number of choices on the main menu. We removed the PTGDU Members option from the main menu and now it can be accessed from the About Us page or on the Join PTGDU link at the bottom of every page. Steve Lambert made the necessary revisions on the website and he also added new materials and links to several pages. We’re continuing to investigate other options for our website host before we have to renew at the end of this year.

* Monthly News Updates

The new section about life hacks for guide dog handlers that was introduced in the February issue has received several positive comments so we have made it a regular addition to the updates.

• Educational Materials

We’ve been working with the advocacy team to create educational materials. We completed the new service animal flyer for businesses and sent out several announcements about it to various advocacy organizations and service animal schools. K9s For Warriors and The Seeing Eye submitted photos for the flyer. We’ve also been working on supplemental information to accompany the new rideshare poster. Guide Dogs for the Blind, Leader Dogs for the Blind, and The Seeing Eye submitted photos for the poster.

**Public Relations**

Chair: Sadie Donnell

Email: president@pinetreeguidedogusers.org

-PTGDU’s Spring Membership meeting will feature Nicholas Giudice, PhD., Professor of Spatial Informatics at the University of Maine, and founder & Chief Research Scientist of the Virtual Environments and Multimodal Interaction Laboratory. He will be discussing his team’s extensive research on making fully autonomous vehicles accessible for use by blind and low vision passengers. He will also discuss other autonomous systems and the importance of getting input and guidance from blind users in the development of these technologies.

**-PTGDU member Bonnie Mosen wrote a press release for the new service animal flyer. It was reprinted in The Portland Press Herald. MaineBiz.com also responded to the press release and wrote an extensive article about service animals and access to public places in Maine. Members Jim & Ginger Kutsch were interviewed for the article and PTGDU’s new service animal flyer was highlighted in the story.**

**-In March, a Community Support Specialist from Abilities First in Springfield, MO emailed PTGDU to request a speaker for her group. We referred her to GDUI but she received no response so we sent a second referral to Missouri Association of Guide Dog Users.**

**-In February, we received a request for more information about our organization from a potential donor.**