# **Pine Tree Guide Dog Users Committee Reports**

**November 6, 2024**

## **Advocacy & Legislative**

Brad Strause, Chair

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

1. August -- bringing your guide dog into recreational settings with swimming pools; and detailed guidance for safe practices concerning access in healthcare settings for patients, visitors, and employees with service animals
2. September – NFB resolution to pass legislation that would create a national framework for autonomous vehicles that ensures equal access to transportation for blind and low-vision people; and a resource for access requirements to VA facilities.
3. October – info about PTGDU’s Educational Corner on our website; and a resource for international travel with your guide dog.

A series of posts regarding rideshare denials were created for our Facebook page and a post about the CDC’s new entry requirements into the United States received the second most viewed post for the quarter.

## **Membership**

Email: membership@PineTreeGuideDogUsers.org

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

- An invitation to join PTGDU was included in the October Monthly News Update, and a reminder to pay dues was included in the November issue. So far, five members have renewed their membership.

- Guide Dog Users, Inc. sent out a revised affiliate membership spreadsheet that includes a new question asking if the member is a current or former guide dog handler.

## **Publications, Newsletter, & Website**

Ginger Kutsch, Chair

Email: news @PineTreeGuideDogUsers.org

•Facebook

1. Members & Friends Facebook: 77 members

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

1. Official Facebook: 226 likes, 320 followers

[www.facebook.com/PTGDU](http://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:

1.August 21. Post reach 3,240.

The modern guide dog story? It all began in 1916 during the First World War, with thousands of soldiers returning from the Front blinded, often by poison gas. A German doctor, Dr Gerhard Stalling, got the idea of training dogs en masse to help those affected. While walking with a patient one day through the hospital grounds, he was called away urgently and left his dog with the patient as company. When he returned, he saw signs, from the way the dog was behaving, that it was looking after the blind patient.

Dr Stalling started to explore ways of training dogs to become reliable guides and in August 1916 opened the world’s first guide dog school for the blind in Oldenburg. The school grew and many new branches opened in Bonn, Breslau, Dresden, Essen, Freiburg, Hamburg, Magdeburg, Münster and Hannover, training up to 600 dogs a year. These schools provided dogs not only to ex-servicemen, but also to blind people in Britain, France, Spain, Italy, the United States, Canada and the Soviet Union.

Unfortunately, due to a reduction in dog quality, the venture had to shut down in 1926, but by that time another large guide dog training center had opened in Potsdam, near Berlin, which was proving to be highly successful. This school’s work broke new ground in the training of guide dogs and it was capable of accommodating around 100 dogs at a time and providing up to 12 fully-trained guide dogs a month. Read more about the history of guide dogs at https://www.igdf.org.uk/guide-dogs/history-of-guide-dogs/

Photo Description: Seeing Eye instructor JT sitting on a blue sofa with a golden retriever in harness at his feet. He has shoulder-length dark hair and a beard and is wearing a navy cap, a green long-sleeved shirt with The Seeing Eye logo, and gray pants. He is smiling, and his left arm is around the golden who is looking directly at the camera. The team is outside a clothing store with an overhead sign shaped like an arrow which reads Geoffrey.

2. August 6. Post reach 1900.

Finding the CDC’s new entry requirements for your dog as clear as mud? Check out the Frequently Asked Questions about entering or returning to the U.S. with your dog at <https://www.cdc.gov/importation/dogs/faqs.html>

Photo Description: Riddle, a light-colored yellow Lab Guiding Eyes puppy is sitting on a wooden deck. Her face and paws are covered in mud and she looks extremely happy. The background includes a green grassy area with trees, a white fence, and outdoor furniture.

* Website

-After careful consideration, PTGDU renewed its subscription with our current web host for three additional years.

-The annual spring membership meeting minutes and committee reports have been added to the website.

• Education and Outreach

-Our team has asked that a brainstorming session be held at the November membership meeting so that members can share ideas they may have about possible projects for 2025.

-Guiding Eyes for the Blind included information about our rideshare handout in it rideshare resource document posted on the school’s website.

 - A copy of our handout for healthcare providers was published in The American Council of the Blind’s November – December issue of The Braille Forum.

 - We received inquiries from info@PineTreeGuideDogUsers.org requesting information about qualify for a guide dog; transitioning from fully sighted to low vision; and the available formats for our rideshare poster.

## **Public Relations**

Sadie Donnell, Chair

Sadie represented PTGDU on a panel discussion at the Moving Maine Network (MMN) Transportation Justice Summit held October 29th in Bangor. The summit focused on improving transportation access for all Mainers – especially for those who cannot drive or struggle to afford transportation. The program featured two keynote speakers -- Jose Richard Aviles of the Othering and Belonging Institute; and Anna Letitia Zivarts, author of the new book When Driving Is Not an Option: Steering Away from Car Dependency. The program also included the initial findings from MMN’s Data and Story Collection Project outlining how transportation barriers are hurting Mainers; and an exercise in the Creation of a Shared Vision for universal transportation access in Maine. Sadie will share her experience at our next board meeting.