Graduate Quarterly Call April 28, 2024 Summary

Topic: introducing the 2024-2025 Graduate Council members

Jose Lopez-Masso, Graduate Council Interim President, welcomed everyone.

He reiterated the Graduate council’s successful initiative to request an increase to the Graduate Assistance Fund, the last increase being made in 2018.

Jose acknowledged the three outgoing Graduate Council members for their years of dedication and service. These committed individuals are Becky Davidson, Cindy LaBon and Andrea Conner, who all agreed that a rewarding part of their volunteer work was speaking with trainees and graduates.

Jose called upon the returning Graduate Council members to reintroduce themselves, followed by the three new members.

Jose Lopez-Masso: Louis is Jose’s active working guide dog for almost two years now. This pup is a male yellow labrador, also known as Luis.

Judy Matthews: Lyons, a male black Lab, and Judy have been working together eight months. They live in Colorado Springs with Judy’s husband, retired GEB guide dog Keats, and retired PTSD service dog, Spike. Judy is employed by the state of Colorado, Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, as a VR therapist. She will be serving her final year on the Council, due to her appointment to fill a vacated two-year term in 2023.

Tina Reisner: Tina is working her second Guiding Eyes dog, a female Shepherd named Kahlua. At 18 years of age, she was matched with her first guide dog.

Tina is employed as an instructor at the Division of Services for the Blind in Salt Lake City, Utah. In her leisure time, she enjoys hiking, running, and going to the beach.

Ashley Townsend: Ashley just completed her first year on the Council. Lolly, a female black Labrador from the Running Guide Program, is Ashley’s second guide dog; first from Guiding Eyes. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Music Therapist with a private practice in Denver, Colorado.

Pat Leahy: Hogan, a male yellow Lab, has been guiding Pat the past four years in their home area of Capitol Hill, Washington DC. The team travels through downtown DC where Pat works in elections. Pat has completed two years of his term on the Council, having been instrumental in founding the Guide Dog Book Club.

Mariana Canalizo: Originally from Mexico, Mariana relocated to Miami, Florida ten years ago. She was matched with Einstein, her second guide dog, in 2022. Mariana will begin her career in Counseling Rehabilitation at UMASS Boston. She applied to and was invited to serve a three-year term on the Graduate Council.

Alex Reese: Since their successful pairing in November 2022, Alex and his first guide dog, Ballou, have been living in Manhattan, NY. Alex has been working remotely for a media agency and looks forward to the hustle and bustle returning to the office in New York City will bring for him and Ballou. Alex is also a new member of the Graduate Council.

Pamela McGonigle: this is the third new member to the Graduate Council. The Guiding Eyes Running Guide Program (RGP) has matched Pamela with two qualified dogs from the program. Meta, now retired, was the third successfully trained dog and Pamela’s first guide dog. Mary, a black Labrador, is actively working with Pamela in Pennsylvania, where they live with Pamela’s husband and 21-year-old son. Pamela is employed at the Overbrook School for the Blind, where she serves as Director of Development and Communications. One of their initiatives is the Blind Ameri core Program, whose goal is to address the 80%

Unemployment rate among the blind community. In addition to running, Pamela maintains her physical fitness by hiking and weightlifting.

A few comments were made by the following-

Andrea: She encouraged graduates interested in serving on the Graduate Council to continue applying on an annual basis, even though they had not been selected. After several applications, she was invited to fill a vacated term. Andrea held several offices: Recording Secretary, Vice President, and President.

Pat: he gave an update on the Guide Dog Book Club. The first discussion, featuring the book, Trusting Calvin, written by Sharon Peters, had 75 attendees. The second meeting, with 70 attendees, featured Christie Bane, author of Forward Together. The third meeting was an interactive discussion between the 30 attendees and Mark Carlson, author of The Blond Leading the Blind. The next meeting is planned for June; all are welcome to join – graduates/handlers, friends, family, and puppy raisers. Contact the Book Club Team with feedback and/or suggestions at: guidedogbookclub@gmail.com

Ashley and Tina: they shared how facilitating the last (February 2024) Grief and Bereavement graduate call impacted them personally, as well as our fellow graduates that participated. Author Ann Chiappetta began the session with a beautiful poem she had written. They look forward to future calls that will help support the needs of graduates, whatever stage of grieving they are at.

Judy: she writes the monthly Pill Reminder articles. Judy appreciates your feedback and welcomes suggestions.

Jose: A goal of the Graduate Council is to have its group of members come from diverse backgrounds. He would like Council to sponsor a monthly call whereby graduates have the opportunity to engage in open discussion with Council members, therefore, increase communication. Each of these calls would be topic driven.

Graduate Council will share information and/or comment on posts via the GEB email list serve and two Facebook groups. Council members are here for Guiding Eyes, its staff, graduates, trainers, and instructors.

Reach out to the Graduate Council at gebgradcouncil@gmail.com if you have any suggestions, questions, or comments for them.