Sunny Days are Here Again

After spending 16 months on NBC, it’s time for Sunny, the TODAY puppy with a purpose, to spread some more sunshine as he embarks on his new career.

After the successful teaming of service dog Charlie with retired Air Force Staff Sergeant Stacy Pearsall in December 2017, we partnered again with NBC to raise another puppy on air. This time, the Guide Dog Foundation would provide the puppy.

The newest puppy with a purpose was introduced in February 2018, and he was joined by four of his siblings. These pups were raised on NBC affiliate stations in Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, and Los Angeles.

Within days, the puppy squad had names chosen by viewers: Sunny in New York; Izzy in Atlanta; Camden in Baltimore; Brady in Boston; and Zuma in Los Angeles. Sunny and Izzy would train to become future guide dogs, while Brady, Camden, and Zuma were slated to follow a service dog path.

Olivia Poff, who had raised Charlie, was once again the on-air raiser and trainer for Sunny. Over the past year, Sunny and Poff had many adventures in Manhattan and across the country. The two appeared regularly on TODAY to update viewers on his progress.

In addition to guide dog work, Sunny was also taught specific service dog tasks, such as pressing a button or opening a door or retrieving dropped items. This cross-
In June, Sunny, the Guide Dog Foundation “puppy with a purpose,” completed his journey on NBC and the TODAY morning show. After careful evaluation by our staff, we decided that the best career for him would be as a facility dog at the Henry Viscardi School at The Viscardi Center, where he will work with children with severe physical disabilities. Learn more about Sunny’s time at NBC and his new career in our cover story.

One of the Guide Dog Foundation’s most popular events is Recognition Day, the day we set aside to honor the hard work and dedication of our volunteers and the unwavering support of our donors from Lions Clubs from the tri-state area, the Knights of Columbus, and community fundraising groups.

Last year, almost 1600 volunteers across the country contributed more than 3 million hours of their time. Without their commitment, we wouldn’t be able to accomplish our mission.

We have many volunteer opportunities at the Foundation. Learn more at Volunteer.GuideDog.org.

Planned giving is a way for you to provide for your heirs while also creating a lasting legacy by supporting the Guide Dog Foundation. We recently signed with Crescendo Interactive, a company that provides information on a range of planned giving options. Our first Crescendo newsletter focused on how to create a legacy by establishing a plan that meets your priorities.

If you’d like to learn more about our planned giving options, sponsorships, or other ways to support our mission, please contact Katherine Fritz, our director of development, at Katherine@GuideDog.org, or visit our website.

Once again, the Guide Dog Foundation earned the GuideStar Platinum Seal of Transparency, which is the organization’s highest rating. Platinum status shows our commitment to sharing our goals and strategies, and how we measure our progress and the results our efforts have on people’s lives.

You trust us to ensure your donor dollars are spent wisely, and we want to repay that trust by being as transparent as possible. Thank you for your ongoing support.

John Miller
President & Chief Executive Officer
“My faith calls me to serve others,” Ruthann Collins says. “I believe in it so strongly, I got my first tattoo. It’s on my foot.” The tattoo, written in ancient Aramaic, is from the book of Micah and reads: “What does God expect of you? But to love kindness, do justice and have mercy ... and walk humbly with your God.” So the whole notion of being profiled in *The Guideway*, “goes against my foot,” she says with a laugh.

But Collins’s dedication to the Guide Dog Foundation and America’s VetDogs is an example for others, not a boast. It is a dedication borne of answering the call to serve.

Collins was a director of human resources when her company was bought out by another, and her position was eliminated. “I got a very nice parachute,” she says, which allowed her to get her real estate license, with the goal of returning to school to study theology.

Why? Because Collins had felt a calling. She had always felt comfortable with religion, but this was something more, and her husband encouraged her to pursue her call to ministry. She says, “He’s the one who told me, ‘You have to do this,’” even though she knew that by the time she finished her theological studies, she would have passed the maximum age limit to be ordained an Episcopal priest.

So even before then, Collins was ordained a minister through the National Christian Church, a choice informed by her sense of social justice.

She earned her certification in Educational Ministries and Foundations for Christian Studies at the Mercer School of Theology in Garden City, which was created in the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island to educate clergy and lay ministers.

Mercer’s schedule of night and Saturday classes suited her. “I could sell real estate and still go to school,” she says; the family needed her income because her son was in college at the same time.

A spiritual path

After graduation, Collins “started my own little cottage business of doing motivational speaking, preaching, and teaching in small to mid-size churches, and I did management workshops for both secular and church organizations in strategic planning and organizational development.”

While she was under contract to a multi-ecumenical resource center, Collins got a call from the dean of the Cathedral of the Incarnation in Garden City.

“He was an intriguing guy, and he said, ‘Bishop [Orris G.] Walker said I should give you a call.’ When I asked why, he said, ‘Because I’m looking for somebody to do faith formation here at the cathedral,’” and her name kept popping up.

She wasn’t interested, but by the time he was done, he had convinced her to meet with him. She laughs as she recounts the story: “I’m doing everything opposite my HR training. I’m dressed the wrong way for an interview, I’m not at all prepared, but to appease him and Bishop Walker, at least he can say he talked to me.”

They met, and two and a half hours later, Collins says, “The dean asked me, ‘So do you want the job?’ I said, ‘I don’t know. Do you want me?’ And he said, ‘Yeah, I think I do.’ And I said, ‘Me too. What the heck just happened? I wasn’t going to take a job.’” And he said, “Holy Spirit; it just works its way.”

In her new position as director (later canon) of Christian formation, Collins designed, created, and developed programs to help congregants of all ages develop and strengthen their faith.

After a number of years, she was invited to join the staff of Katharine Jefferts Schori, the first woman elected presiding bishop of the international Episcopal
(continued on page 8)

Mission work among the Quechua people in the high Andes of Ecuador.
On June 27, Radar, the New York Islanders’ puppy with a purpose, was on hand for the team’s annual Blue & White Scrimmage. The Islanders presented the Guide Dog Foundation with a check for $18,850, representing the proceeds from the sale of the Pucks & Paws 2019 calendar. Shown, left to right: volunteer Harvey Gerstel with Lavender; volunteer Eileen Scheiner with Max; John Miller, president and CEO of the Guide Dog Foundation; Ann Rina, community relations director with the Islanders; Lorin Bruzzese, puppy program manager, with Radar.

Recognition Day

Recognition Day is our annual celebration to honor our volunteers, Lions clubs, Knights of Columbus, and other supporters and acknowledge their dedication and commitment.

We hosted a group puppy obedience class; guide dog and service dog graduate speakers; and presentations from Friends of America’s VetDogs, Lions clubs, and the Knights of Columbus Memorare Council #3476. Sy Lederman, a World War II veteran and a guide dog user for 60 years, led us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Our activities for children included a balloon animal maker and a craft project from The Home Depot. New this year, we invited a select group of vendors, ranging from henna artists to chocolatiers to soap makers. An added bonus was a display of classic Corvettes thanks to the Long Island chapter of the National Corvette Restorers Society.
Tam pa–St. Petersburg, Florida

The Suncoast Puppy R isers, our puppy raisers based in the Tampa–St. Petersburg area, recently visited the Chihuly Collection at the Morean Arts Center in St. Petersburg, Florida. Although their guided tour fell through, the group of six pups (plus one guide dog) enjoyed the outing. Chuck Hietala, who heads the group with wife Debbie, reports: “The good news is we got through the museum and the gift shops with no unexpected art purchases due to waging tails! I think the most interesting thing is how the pups did not react to many different light conditions. They adjusted better than we did to bright outdoor light to almost no light, to only blue spectrum florescent and many more.”

Road Trips…

Our puppy raisers hold their group obedience classes in some very interesting places.

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On a recent outing, puppy raisers and their charges visited the National Museum of the U.S. Navy.

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training is useful, because some of our consumers need an assistance dog that can provide both guide and service dog tasks to help them mitigate their disabilities.

**The Stanley Pup**

In April, Sunny was chosen for an extra assignment with NBC Sports: he would be the official Stanley “Pup” hockey correspondent. Sunny and Poff traveled around the country to different NHL playoff games to help spread awareness of the Guide Dog Foundation through in-person and broadcast appearances. An added advantage to all this travel was the different training environments offered by each city.

Sunny’s job as the Stanley Pup culminated when he and Poff attended game 1 of the Stanley Cup finals in Boston between the Boston Bruins and the St. Louis Blues where they were given a broadcast send-off for a job well-done.

**Sunny’s new job**

As Sunny’s time on the TODAY show grew to a close, our team at the Guide Dog Foundation discovered a mild allergy issue that would preclude his being placed as a guide or service dog for an individual with disabilities.

However, he is probably one of the best-trained dogs we have ever prepared, and we wanted to find a place where he could have a positive impact on people’s lives.

Based on a thorough evaluation of his skills, temperament, and training, we concluded that placement at an institution close to the Foundation would allow Sunny to continue to work and allow our canine care team to monitor his health and provide top medical care when needed.

In February, we had hosted representatives from The Viscardi Center, which includes the Henry Viscardi School. The school provides an enriched education to children with severe physical disabilities (pre-K to age 21), who may also require life-sustaining medical treatment during the school day.

John Kemp, the president and CEO of The Viscardi Center, and John Miller, president and CEO of the Guide Dog Foundation and America’s VetDogs, began to explore ways the two organizations could work together.

It seemed a natural for Sunny to have a career as a facility dog, where his skills and temperament could engage with students in an institutional setting.

It was announced officially on June 27, 2019, on NBC’s TODAY that Sunny would be the newest staff member at the Henry Viscardi School.

Sunny has been trained to provide a variety of tasks to engage children as they go about their daily academic activities. He has already made an impact on the students and faculty during his training at the school. (See more at our website, GuideDog.org.)

A faculty member says, “I’ve worked at this school for 21 years, and I’ve never seen the kids react with such enthusiasm and love to anything. Sunny has brought out the best in them.”

We are proud of Sunny and have been honored to witness him blossom into an amazing assistance dog. We are thankful to NBC and TODAY for the awareness they helped raise for Sunny and the mission of the Guide Dog Foundation and we look forward to an amazing difference he’ll make in the lives of hundreds of children he’ll be supporting each school year at the Henry Viscardi School.

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**Sign Up Now**

for our e-newsletters at GuideDog.org
Workplace giving programs are a cost-effective way for the Guide Dog Foundation and America’s VetDogs to raise funds to support their missions.

**Workplace Giving**

You specify the amount you want to donate and your payroll department takes care of the rest. The money comes out of your paycheck before taxes, so you still receive the tax benefits of charitable giving (your payroll department will give you a tax receipt for your records).

Depending on your company, you may also have the chance to influence how your company accomplishes its philanthropic efforts.

Many firms also offer matching gifts or other workplace giving programs. If your employer provides matching funds, we receive an added donation thanks to your participation.

**Refer to the Guide Dog Foundation in your campaign brochure. If there is no index, check:**

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**Combined Federal Campaign (CFC)**

The CFC is the federal government’s annual workplace charity campaign. It runs from September 1, 2019, to January 15, 2020. All federal civilian, postal, and military employees can use the CFC to make direct contributions to the Guide Dog Foundation or America’s VetDogs.

When you sign up for the CFC, your donation is automatically deducted from your paycheck via payroll deductions. Your contributions are tax deductible and tracked during the year, so you will have accurate records at tax time.

Be sure to check our websites and Facebook pages for reminders on how you can participate in the CFC if you work for the federal government.

**State and local campaigns**

The Guide Dog Foundation and America’s VetDogs also participate in similar campaigns for state and local government employees, including United Way campaigns.

If you are uncertain how to name us as your preference for your donation, or if you’d like to establish a workplace giving campaign in your office, please call us at 631-930-9050 (or 866-282-8045).

The Guide Dog Foundation and America’s VetDogs rely on your generosity to help us change the lives of people with disabilities.

**We need puppy raisers in these areas:**

- Long Island, NY
- New York City
- New Jersey (near Newark)
- Florida (near St. Petersburg)
- New England (in MA, NH, CT)
- North Carolina (near Raleigh)
- Pennsylvania (near Scranton)
- Tennessee (near Nashville)
- Georgia (near Atlanta)
- Maryland/Virginia (areas surrounding Washington, DC)

For more information, contact our Puppy Department at Puppies@GuideDog.org or 866-282-8046.
Church. Collins’s ministry with the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society “was the same kind of work that I did for the cathedral, but on an international level. This gave me the opportunity to work on social justice issues with our diversity ministries.”

In addition to mission work on First Nations reservations, she also traveled to Central and South America.

In Italy, she worked for a refugee program set up by the Episcopal Church that housed young men who had fled Afghanistan and the Taliban for fear of their lives.

“I got assigned to help the doctor, and when I saw the back of the first ‘kid,’ I just wanted to die. I couldn’t believe it.” It was her first exposure to men who had been beaten and tortured, and it was a shock; Syed, her guide, had assumed she had previously worked with refugees. Later, Collins used that experience to help prepare volunteers so they would not be as horrified as she had been.

While in Europe, she also collaborated with chaplains on military bases. “I led a team that created a resource called Across the Miles, for families who were separated” by military service, she says.

A new purpose

After a series of medical diagnoses, Collins found she was no longer able to continue her mission work. She went from “going 120 miles an hour all over the place” to “being home and being treated.”

But the desire to serve others – especially after so many years – didn’t go away. After six months of being home, she realized she needed a new purpose because idleness wasn’t “going to work for me.”

Collins and her husband had talked in the past of volunteering for the Guide Dog Foundation. He was supportive when she suggested raising a puppy, and “Gypsy,” a female black Labrador Retriever, joined the family in October 2015. Despite Collins’s doubts about the dog’s success, Gypsy was placed as a guide dog in March 2017.

It was a home placement, so Collins did not meet Gypsy’s new handler at Celebration Saturday, but they did talk. “I get on the phone and within two minutes, he’s in tears and I’m in tears.”

Since that first exhilarating experience with Gypsy, she has raised or temped homed eight puppies. She is currently raising puppy Jessie and is the breeder caretaker for Sully (not former President Bush’s service dog). Collins laughs: “She’s Sully Collins, not Sully Bush.”

In addition to her work with puppies and breeders, Collins also volunteers for the speakers bureau. She is one of the docents for the on-campus talk and tour program, and gives presentations to school groups, clubs, or other organizations that want to learn more about the Guide Dog Foundation and America’s VetDogs. She also serves on the Dogs on the Catwalk committee, the Foundation’s annual “canine couture” fashion show.

It’s a hectic schedule for anyone, but Collins says that all her volunteer work is good for her. “The more I move, the better it is for my medical condition.”

She adds: “I have a rule of life, and my rule of life says that I am to do for others.” It is a rule she intends to keep.