Lachelle Smith had worked as an accounting clerk in a hotel and as patient service manager in the healthcare division of a large food service company but found these jobs frustrating and difficult. Despite having graduated with a bachelor’s degree in hotel and restaurant management, she was unfulfilled once she was working in the field. “No matter how much I persevered,” she says, “I was unhappy.”

Although Smith has been visually impaired since birth, she never considered herself “blind.” Her family had taught her to never let labels define who she was.

Smith received services from blindness agencies in Pennsylvania and attended a school for blind children for about two years before she started kindergarten, but her interaction with vision specialists was limited throughout elementary school and high school. “I was low vision, but I had to live the sighted life because I was in a mainstream school,” she says. It wasn’t until she attended college that she began to use adaptive technology.

However, once in the working world, she didn’t feel comfortable asking her employers for the assistive tools to make her jobs easier. She was afraid they would think she was incapable of handling the work. Instead, she was doing what she always did: “seeking my own solutions for job tasks I had difficulty performing.”

(continued on page 6)
In our previous fiscal year, 78 percent of the funds we raised for our programs came from individual donors or from wills and bequests. We’re grateful for each and every one and the support it means for people who are blind or visually impaired.

We created the Guide Dog Visionary program for supporters who want to support the Guide Dog Foundation on a recurring basis. It costs more than $50,000 to raise and train one guide dog, and the process takes about 18 months; there is never a charge to the individual for their guide dog and training.

Consistent funding is key to our planning, and monthly gifts allow us to plan ahead with confidence. There are examples in this issue of The Guideway that highlight how lives are changed … lives you’ve changed. You can find out more about our recurring gift program at Visionary.GuideDog.org.

As you plan for your financial future, please consider making a planned gift to the Guide Dog Foundation to help our mission in the near- and long-term. When you create an estate plan, you decide how to protect your family, support the causes you believe in, and leave a legacy that reflects the things that matter to you. For more information on our planned giving opportunities, please contact Jennifer Gisler, chief growth officer, at Jennifer.Gisler@GuideDog.org, for your own estate planning guide and to discuss your options.

I’m proud to announce that Charles Bonomo has joined the boards of Guide Dog Foundation and America’s VetDogs. Charles is the senior vice president and CIO of MSC Industrial Supply Co., with a long and extensive career within the national business community. We welcome his expertise and commitment to our missions.

In this issue, you’ll read about guide dog graduate Lachelle Smith, who discovered a career where she could help other blind individuals learn life and coping skills; catch up on the adventures of puppy with a purpose Radar, who has returned to our campus and is training to become a guide dog; and share Kolby Garrison’s heartfelt memorial to her guide dog.

We’re excited to face the challenges of 2020, and I welcome your passion on our journey to provide guide dogs for people who are blind or have low vision. Thank you for your support.

John Miller
President & Chief Executive Officer

Corporate

Puppy with a Purpose

Are you looking for a way to build morale, get your employees involved in volunteerism, and foster goodwill and loyalty within your community? When you partner with the Guide Dog Foundation in our corporate puppy with a purpose program, we will work together to raise a puppy to become a future guide or service dog for an individual with disabilities.

You can choose to raise the puppy with a volunteer from your organization or we can provide a puppy raiser. For the next 16 months, your team will be involved in the puppy’s development as a future guide or service dog. At the end of that time, the puppy will continue its formal training with a certified instructor from the Guide Dog Foundation and will be matched with a person who is visually impaired or who has another disability.

An added benefit to our partnership is an enhanced social media presence and media opportunities for you and your organization. And, ultimately, you will have helped an individual who is blind or visually impaired to live without boundaries.

For more information on our corporate puppy with a purpose program and to learn more about the benefits, please contact philanthropy officer Karman Pun at 631-930-9095 or Karman.Pun@GuideDog.org.
Puppy Radar took a momentous step in December 2019. After spending 15 months with the New York Islanders hockey team and his puppy raiser, Jimmy Tubbs, Radar returned to the Guide Dog Foundation to begin his formal training to become a guide dog for someone who is blind or has low vision.

**Radar Returns for Guide Dog Training**

Radar’s puppy raiser, Jimmy Tubbs, is no stranger to puppy raising nor the Islanders. His association with the team began when he was working for a national restaurant group based in Chicago, Illinois, handling outside sales and catering events. On a routine visit to discuss advertising opportunities with the Islanders, he proposed the restaurant cater all the meals for the team’s annual training camp. For the next two years, he worked closely with management, even advising them as they set up their own in-house kitchen and cooking staff.

It was during this time that Tubbs was raising puppy Caroline, so he would often bring the puppy with him to the Islanders locker room where she would interact with the players. (Caroline began formal guide dog training, but was released for medical reasons just as she was getting ready to be matched. Tubbs subsequently adopted her.)

The Guide Dog Foundation and America’s VetDogs had partnered with the team for their Pucks and Paws charity calendar in 2018, and discussion turned to how the team could get more involved with our missions.

At the end of August 2018, players Matt Martin and Thomas Hickey visited the Foundation to choose the puppy that was ultimately named Radar, to honor long-time Isles coach Al Arbour, whose nickname was “Radar.”

Tubbs was asked to be Radar’s puppy raiser because of his previous experience as a volunteer puppy raiser, relationship with the team, and his familiarity with high-profile settings. He estimates that he and Radar did about 90 events together such as attending Islanders pre-game parties and home games at both the Barclay Center in Brooklyn and the Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, New York; participating in fundraising events, and making other personal appearances.

Tubbs is also a real estate agent and would bring Radar with him to the office and occasionally to open houses when they weren’t busy with Islanders-related activities. Radar also accompanied Tubbs on family vacations. “He was quite the social butterfly,” Tubbs says. “He had this way about him.”

It wasn’t all play. The pair also attended twice-a-month group puppy classes, where they practiced age-appropriate tasks and interacted with other pups and their raisers. Before they knew it, it was time for Radar to begin his formal training as a guide dog for an individual who is blind or visually impaired. The night before he returned to the Foundation, the Islanders aired a video tribute to Radar during an away game. Tubbs recalls the outpouring of emotion and says that night was a little difficult, “but all is good,” he says. When he returned Radar to the Foundation and said good-bye, Radar trotted away, ready to take the next step in his journey.
Dear Sunny:
Happy 2-year-old birthday! Thank you for helping me when I am feeling sad. You make me laugh. Hope you have a great birthday.
Love, Ryan

Sunny Turns 2!

Sunny, who began his career as the NBC TODAY puppy with a purpose and became a facility dog at the Henry Viscardi School at The Viscardi Center in Albertson, New York, celebrated his second birthday in January. The students threw him a surprise party, complete with cards and hats and a special Sunny cake.

It’s important that our puppies grow up to be strong, confident dogs. In December, we held a puppy class at the Farmingville Fire Department in Farmingville, New York. Firehouses are a great way to get the puppies used to many different sights, noises, and smells so they remain calm and connected to their handlers.
Meet Cori Copley…

Meet Cori Copley…

the newest canine ambassador at the Fairmont Copley Plaza in Boston, Massachusetts. Cori was placed by the Guide Dog Foundation to be a facility dog. She will greet guests as they arrive, visit meetings upon request, accompany guests on walks around the city, and attend community events.

The hotel’s first canine ambassador, Catie Copley, also came from the Foundation. She was released from guide dog training for health reasons and found a new career at the Copley Plaza. Catie worked for the hotel for 12 years and became a Boston celebrity – she even had two books written about her adventures! After the black Lab passed away in 2017, the hotel erected a plaque in her memory.

Congratulations to our newest guide dog mobility instructors: (L-R) Cristina Mirabile, Cameron McLendon, and Anna Williams, who successfully completed our apprentice program.

Apprentices follow a three-year program that includes lectures and practical work, with skill assessments and exams throughout their training. This program meets the GDMI educational requirements of the International Guide Dog Federation.

Welcome Our New Teams

November 2019
Changing directions

When Smith was laid off 18 months into a new position, she viewed it as an opportunity to figure out what direction she wanted to take in life.

At a previous job, an assistive technology specialist had helped her with some special software. Seeing that Smith was unsatisfied with her job, the specialist told her she might be better suited as a vision rehabilitation therapist.

Vision rehabilitation therapists work with individuals who are blind to teach them how to navigate – safely and independently – the activities of daily living, at whatever level they’re comfortable with.

Even though she had been legally blind her whole life, Smith had not received these types of services herself. “When it was introduced to me, I was like, ‘Oh my god, there’s a profession.’ I was intrigued, and I fell in love with it immediately,” she says.

However, her husband had doubts. He had never heard of VRT and wondered about its viability as a profession. He attended her admission interview to learn more. “He and I both left that interview feeling encouraged, and I felt that I had finally found a profession that fit me, my interests, my goals, and my personal calling to help people like me,” Smith says.

With her husband on board and the support of her extended family to help with their two daughters – one a toddler and the other an infant – Smith began her studies at Salus University’s VRT master’s degree program.

She experienced another blindness milestone at Salus. Years before, “I had had maybe one session with [the white cane],” Smith says. She never used it in college, but now, in grad, school, she discovered she needed it when she was in unfamiliar environments, when it was extremely bright outside, and at night. Still, it was an emotional decision. “I had a like/hate relationship with the cane. I viewed it as a tool of blindness, and while I understood some of my limitations due to my visual impairment, I was passing for sighted and didn’t want to be viewed or perceived to be different because of my vision.”

She adds, “It wasn’t until I completed my graduate program that I began to understand who I was as a visually impaired person.”

A new career direction

Smith continues to run her own private practice, but several years ago she was approached by her colleagues at Salus to come work for the university’s VRT program. She began as the coordinator of the master’s and certificate programs and is now the director of the VRT programs and an adjunct professor; she is responsible for teaching and molding future vision rehabilitation therapists.

It’s a job that involves a lot of travel. Once her students have completed their coursework, they do internships all over the country. It’s Smith’s job to observe her students during their practical experience in the field. “Wherever my student is located or practicing is where I go,” she says.

This past summer, Smith spent a month in Canada, working with staff from Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada so they could become certified vision rehabilitation therapists.

A traveling companion

The desire to travel more freely and more safely informed her decision to get a guide dog. Smith came to realize that with the amount of traveling she does (continued on page 8)
My beloved Amelia,

Words cannot articulate your impact in my life. You were vivacious, vocal, and quirky. I am blessed beyond measure to have been your handler for over five and a half years. You were my guide dog and my partner. You took on life with me with enthusiasm, and your love for guiding me was evident. You barked every time I picked up your harness; excitedly found seats for me wherever we were; saved me from countless turning and hybrid vehicles in our path; and learned to ignore skateboards with a lot of work and effort on both our parts.

You attended numerous NASCAR races with me and wore your Mutt Muffs ear protection whenever cars were on track. You loved it when I would remove your harness to visit with the Motor Racing Network Radio commentators. You learned that a restart after a caution flag meant that you would receive a food reward and reminded me by forcefully poking me with your pointy nose if I happened to forget due to being absorbed in what was occurring on the racetrack. You jumped over the pit wall at the racetrack without hesitation and handled the chaotic, noisy NASCAR environment with ease. You were with me whenever I sang anywhere.

We navigated the courthouse together during my court-reporting internship; flew to New Orleans for the National Court Reporters Association annual convention; and flew to visit your puppy raiser. You were with me as I learned to provide Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) for people who are deaf or hard of hearing and as I celebrated passing a 5-minute 225-words-per-minute testimony stenography speed test.

You were with me when I was confident in where we were going and when I was uncertain of our destination. You loved people; butt scratches; food rewards; the sound of your own voice; and chasing me or anyone else who would let you chase them. I cannot thank the Guide Dog Foundation enough for matching me with you.

Thank you, my beloved Amelia, for enhancing my independence and enriching my life. Thank you for everything that you did for and with me as my guide dog. I love you.

Kolby
nowadays, the cane was slowing her down. “I had a tendency to run into things more or just was never able to really view my surroundings without a quick scanning. I was constantly moving my head back and forth, and I would get very tense.”

Before choosing the Guide Dog Foundation, she made sure to do her research, which included speaking with friends who had guide dogs from the Foundation. It was also important to her that the Foundation is accredited by both the International Guide Dog Federation and Assistance Dogs International. “I thought it was a really great program. I love the small class sizes, the convenient location to my home, and the actual [learning] strategies.”

Smith was teamed with Lyra, a Standard Poodle, because her husband has severe allergies to dog dander. “The training experience was wonderful,” she says. “My trainer was very patient … I had a lot of questions. He helped me to link this new information with things I could relate to past experiences so there would be a bridge of understanding. I really connected with that.”

Students spend the first week of class learning the basics of guide dog handling. In the second week, their instructor will customize their training to address specific needs or areas students want to work on. For Smith, this included visiting a church and learning how to find a pew and settle Lyra under it. “I go to church a lot, so it was great to get that experience.”

In the three months since they’ve been a team, Smith reports that she and Lyra “have been traipsing all over Philadelphia and have gone out of state at least once.” While she’s still figuring out how she might incorporate Lyra in her classroom with her students come the summer, the dog has been welcomed both at work and at home.

Smith’s faith is very important to her. “I believe that my visual impairment is a blessing to my life. There are burdens associated with blindness, but for me, the blessings significantly outweigh the burdens.”

Her guide dog is one of those blessings.