“As long as I can walk
I'll have a Seeing Eye® dog.

I'm 80 years old and I still walk two miles
just about every day, even in the winter.

On a good day, no ice or snow, we can do
two miles in 35 minutes. One of these
years maybe I'll slow down.

Not yet, though!”

Dr. Louis Leotta
My name is Jim Kutsch, and as a college student in 1970 I was matched with my first Seeing Eye dog, a German shepherd named Sheba. Thirty-six years later, I became the first graduate of The Seeing Eye to be named its President and CEO. The picture shows me with my arm around my current partner, a German shepherd named Vegas.

Since 1929, The Seeing Eye has been partnering people who are blind or visually impaired with dogs we have trained to guide them. Seeing Eye dogs are renowned the world over for their intelligence, loyalty, and gentleness. We have created more than 16,500 Seeing Eye partnerships, and each one is an amazing, inspiring, and unique story. We wanted to share a few of these stories with you, featuring recent graduates of The Seeing Eye.

Thanks to your generous support, The Seeing Eye is creating new amazing stories of partnerships every day.
Michael Ervolini of Boston, Massachusetts, graduated from The Seeing Eye recently after being matched with Warden, his first Seeing Eye dog. The photo shows Michael, who has a master’s degree from the University of Pennsylvania, in a navy blue sweatshirt from that school. He is crouching next to Warden, a black Labrador retriever, in front of a black metal railing on The Seeing Eye campus.

Michael is a pioneer in the field of behavioral finance – that is, determining why investment decisions are made, and how the decision-making process can be improved.

Just as making sound investment decisions is a talent that can be honed, so too is working a Seeing Eye dog. “It’s just like any other skill I’ve developed. When you first start, you’re incompetent,” Michael said while still in class at The Seeing Eye. “Right now I’m incredibly incompetent. But I’m improving, every day. Warden is teaching me a lot.”

Michael came to The Seeing Eye because he travels frequently. “I want to be able to go farther afield,” said Michael. “When you’re using a cane, once you go off your mental map, travel can become very laborious. But the dog sees what’s ahead.”
Frank Gaudioso Jr. of Newburgh, New York, first came to The Seeing Eye in 1981 to be matched with a golden retriever named Spar. This summer he returned for his fourth, a yellow Labrador/golden retriever cross named Arthur. The picture shows Frank with his arm around Arthur, who looks like he’s smiling!

A top high school athlete, Frank was jumpstarting a car when the battery blew up in his face. Never giving up on his love of sports, he attended University of South Carolina-Coastal and majored in physical education, then got a master’s degree from the State University of New York at New Paltz with the intention of pursuing his dream of becoming a coach.

“It’s tough to get your foot in the door in sports as a blind guy, believe me. Some parents complained. Some people were nicer about it, but they still asked, ‘How is this even possible?’ But there were some people who believed in me. And the ones who didn’t believe, I convinced,” said Frank, who has been a coach – in baseball, soccer, volleyball, basketball, and softball – for 25 years.
The photo shows Jaylenne Moore of Syracuse, New York, crouching down to hug her Seeing Eye dog Jovi, a golden retriever. Jaylenne is pursuing her master's degree in social work and also is a volunteer for Compassionate Cooks, which prepares care packages and meals for those who need them. She also is a Sunday school teacher at DeWitt Community Church.

“My Seeing Eye dog really fits with my personality,” Jaylenne said. “I’m very impulsive. I have a lot of get up and go! I like to just go and explore and that’s not always a good idea when you’re in a new area and using a cane.”

Jaylenne said she initially felt too sad to get another dog after her previous dog, Simone, retired. But in July she came back to be matched with Jovi. “I think of it as having a huge sketchbook, with all those big blank pages. Those blank pages are your heart, and each page can be for each dog. So Jovi is already writing all kinds of cute and wonderful things on his page,” she said.

“It’s like having children. You love them all and there’s always room in your heart to love another.”
Roman Gamboa of Boise, Idaho, came to The Seeing Eye to be matched with his first Seeing Eye dog, a male German shepherd named Rascal. The picture shows Roman crouching next to Rascal with a split rail fence behind them. In the background is the front lawn of The Seeing Eye campus.

“I did quite a bit of research, and I felt like The Seeing Eye was the best school for me,” said Roman, a massage therapist with three children. “The training, the history, the dogs. It was the right call. It's been a great experience.”

The name Rascal implies an impish spirit, but Rascal is very focused, Roman said. “If he’s a troublemaker, he hasn’t let me know about it yet,” he said. “Rascal is very goal-oriented. He wants to do his job and do it right. When he's out of harness, he's very relaxed. He’s a pretty mellow guy.”
Becca Meyers of Baltimore, Maryland, is a world record-holding distance swimmer. The photo shows Becca sitting with her first Seeing Eye dog, a yellow Labrador/golden cross named Birdie, on the campus of The Seeing Eye.

Becca’s best events are the 100-meter fly, 200-meter individual medley, and the 400-meter freestyle. She set two world records and earned six medals (four gold, two silver) at the 2014 Pan Pacific Para-Swimming Championships, and won the 2015 ESPY award as Best Female Athlete with a Disability.

Becca, who started competitively swimming at the age of 6, told The Baltimore Sun about the time she met 18-time gold medal winner Michael Phelps while working out at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. “He started picking on me, making fun of how short I am,” she said. “I stepped up to the bar and did 12 straight pullups. That shut him up.”

Becca is a junior at Franklin & Marshall College, where she is majoring in history. “Walking around on a college campus can be pretty overwhelming. People are coming at you from all directions,” she said. “Walking around with Birdie is a lot easier. And a lot more fun!”
This is a wedding photo of Seeing Eye graduate Jay Durnan with his wife, Melissa. Melissa is wearing a long white wedding dress and holding a bouquet of flowers; Jay is wearing a black tuxedo. His right arm is around Melissa and his left hand holds the leash to his Seeing Eye dog, Beck, a yellow Labrador retriever. Beck is wearing his harness, and a black bow tie around his neck!

“On our wedding day, Beck was the ring bearer,” Jay recalled. “He looked extremely cute, with a doggie bowtie around his neck and a paw-shaped pouch resting on his back, attached to his harness. He did great during the wedding rehearsal, but on the actual wedding day, he got a little excited and gave a hard shake – and Melissa’s ring went flying!”

Luckily, the ring didn’t get too far and it was quickly retrieved and slipped onto the bride’s finger at the appropriate moment.

“Despite the little hiccup, it was wonderful having Beck with us on our wedding day and including him in our photos. No matter how many other dogs we have in the future, he’ll always be remembered as the one who was there for such an important event!”
Of course, you will hear anyone who has had a Seeing Eye dog talk about the added independence that such a special guide will bring to one’s life,” says Richard Quan, a lawyer living in York, Ontario. The photo shows Richard with his arm around his fifth Seeing Eye dog, a German shepherd named Gus.

“In fact, independence, dignity, and self-worth, are all values that support The Seeing Eye’s philosophy and are desired goals for us all to achieve; and these are made more possible by sharing a working relationship with a Seeing Eye dog.

“What I’d like to stress, though, is something that isn’t said much but is certainly felt by each and every one of us who have had the special opportunity of being able to share a relationship with such a working partner. For me, a Seeing Eye dog has taught me how to share my life with another living being; to accept each other on nothing but trust alone; to take care of each other’s needs throughout our time together; and ultimately, to be able to let go, maybe not so easily, but with some semblance of dignity.”
Ramona Rice is the founder and director of the Collaborative Partnership in Utah for People with Vision and Hearing Loss, and recently became a trustee for the Disability Law Center in Salt Lake City, Utah. She is now matched with her second Seeing Eye dog, a golden retriever named Stormy. The picture shows Ramona smiling as Stormy leans against her.

“Stormy’s name definitely fits his personality – he’s so full of energy!” Ramona said. “He just brings a perk into my daily life. He makes me laugh, he challenges me to do more. I’ve tried so many different things because of his eagerness to do new things.”

Ramona was born with Usher syndrome type 2, a gene mutation which can lead to hearing and vision loss. She is founder of the support group Usher Chicks in Utah. When men wanted to join, it became Usher Chicks and Dudes! She also is working with the Usher Syndrome Coalition to publish a book of stories from people with Usher syndrome.

“The only thing Stormy doesn’t love to do is go shopping,” Ramona said. “Isn’t that just like a man!”
Amanda Keleher of Tucson, Arizona, returned to The Seeing Eye to be matched with her second Seeing Eye dog, a black Labrador retriever named Alice. The photo shows Amanda and Alice on a bright summer day striding briskly on the leisure path, which winds around the campus of The Seeing Eye.

“When I was 7 years old, my parents and I were at the mall in Grand Junction, Colorado, and there was a man there with a guide dog. It was so cool! I told my dad, ‘I’m going to get a guide dog this summer!’ And my dad said, ‘You can’t yet. You’re in second grade!’ So I waited until I was in college.”

Amanda’s first Seeing Eye dog, Lara, helped her navigate the University of Arizona – in and out of the classroom. “Lara would lead me right to an empty seat,” Amanda said. “That’s important. It’s super awkward to sit in a seat that’s already occupied!”

Amanda now works for the Southern Arizona Veterans Affairs Health Care System, and also is a life coach, motivational speaker, and musician. And Lara, now retired from guiding, is enjoying her second career as a therapy dog… and as the mascot in Amanda’s husband’s chiropractic office!
The photo shows musician Ben Chargot in the Eustis Lounge at The Seeing Eye with his arm around Sammie, a male German shepherd. Behind them is a set of drums – Ben wanted to practice playing around Sammie!

Ben plays the guitar and piano, but his “first and favorite instrument” is the drums, which he’s played since he was a toddler. “I would pound on the floor, toys, anything,” he said. “My dad finally gave me a pair of drumsticks and some empty buckets, and I was hooked.”

You might think vision is critical to being a successful drummer, but Ben says he knows what to strike as long as the drums are set up to his specifications. “If it’s not set up right, I might hit a rim or two before I get comfortable,” he said. “But after I warm up I know where everything is.”

And just as he knew he wanted to be a drummer from an early age, Ben also knew he wanted to have a Seeing Eye dog. “The first time I was here, I picked up the handle and we took off. In that first minute I was walking faster than I’d ever walked before.”
Dale Campbell has had three Seeing Eye dogs -- a chocolate, a black, and now a yellow! Radar is a male Labrador/golden retriever cross. In the photo, taken in the Eustis Lounge at The Seeing Eye, Dale is wearing a colorful shirt and shorts while sitting on the couch. He is leaning down to kiss Radar, who is sitting at his feet. Radar is stretching up to kiss him back!

Dale lost his sight after a car wreck in 1995, and a year later, he was at The Seeing Eye. “Walking down the street for the first time with a dog in harness brought tears to my eyes,” he said. “I’d thought I’d never be able to walk at the pace I wanted again.”

Dale has a podcast called Cooking in the Dark, where he prepares and cooks meals on the air. “As a blind person, we can do anything. Sometimes it just means finding another way to do it,” he said. “Instead of pan frying, I might bake it in the oven. Which is healthier for you anyway. I’ve deep fried turkeys, I’ve grilled steaks, I’ve done it all. You might just have to do it differently. But you can still do it!”
Inspiring Stories

The difference The Seeing Eye makes in the lives of people who are blind is best explained by the graduates of our program – people whose lives are enhanced by their daily experiences with their dogs.

The Seeing Eye is the world’s oldest guide dog school. We breed, raise, and train the world-famous Seeing Eye® dogs, and every month bring blind men and women from across the United States and Canada to our campus in Morristown, New Jersey, to learn how to care for and work with these amazing dogs. We are a charitable organization supported solely by donations from individuals, corporations, and foundations. Please help us put “miracles in motion” by visiting www.SeeingEye.org/SupportUs or by calling (800) 539-4425.