



Suncoast Puppy Raisers  
**Puppy Saturday Meeting**  
**Date: October 15, 2016**  
**Event: Low Vision Expo**  
**Where; Chapel on the Hill**  
**12601 Park Blvd, Seminole**  
**Time: 10:00am – 12:00pm**

Hi everyone,

I am really excited about our next meeting. In 1992, it was at a Low Vision Expo that we had our first exposure to puppy raising. We were exhibitors at the event demonstrating low vision equipment when I walked around to see what else was there. Of course, I was attracted to this very cute yellow Lab puppy named Blair. Her raiser, Phyllis Ulrich, was there representing Southeastern Guide Dogs. I was so excited thinking about being a raiser, I couldn't speak. Although Chuck wasn't as keen about raising, he allowed me to fill out an application. Remember, this was in the dark ages and I had to have it mailed to me, hand fill it out and mail it back. I proudly did it myself waiting for a phone call, while Chuck hoped I would forget all about it. It took almost a year but the phone call came and the rest is history!

October is national "meet the blind" and vision awareness month, so many of these events will be going on across the country. October 15<sup>th</sup>, is National White Cane Safety Day. The White Cane Safety Law provides that anyone using a white cane or service dog has the right of way crossing a street whether or not they are in a cross walk. Each year, groups do a walk to bring attention and awareness of the law. WE will participate in a short walk beginning at 10:30am at Evans Hall.

The expo runs from 10:00am – 2:00pm, and Congressman Jolly will be the key note speaker at 1:00pm. Snacks and refreshments will be available, but of course, be sure to bring some water for your pups. We will see you there.

### *Last Month*

The pups had an awesome college experience with the co-eds of the University of Tampa. They were allowed to be a part of the Delta Gama's recruitment ceremonies and were exposed to about 100 girls singing, clapping and other wise carrying on. There were 7 sessions and at the end of each session, the pups were definitely the center of attention. Most pups only did one or two sessions, but Amy got to do 3. After all that excitement, Amy was one pooped out pup! Thank you Delta Gama for inviting us and we hope we helped you get a lot of great recruits.

Our sub-group meeting normally conducted by Donna and Don Thompson was held on Wednesday August 28<sup>th</sup>. However, the Thompson's were not in attendance, something about being in Jacksonville awaiting their second grandbaby. Personally, I think this was a very flimsy excuse for missing a meeting! Turns out the meeting didn't go off as planned anyways. We had scheduled a ride on a pontoon boat and we were going to anchor on a sand bar so the pups could go for a romp in the gulf. Unfortunately, the boat's engine was dead so we just sat around, had some snacks and visited. One thing about our group is, we love to talk about our dogs! Congratulations Don and Donna on your new grandson!

# GFG Suncoast Puppy Raisers Newsletter

October 2016



**Suncoast Pups visiting the University of Tampa at last month's meeting.**

## *In For Training*

At our sub group meeting, I announced that GDF had a request for “in for training” dogs from Southeastern Guide Dogs. For whatever reason, Southeastern is short on dogs ready to be trained. It is not unusual for guide dog schools to trade favors such as breeding stock and guide dog candidates, so GDF agreed to send 7 dogs to Southeastern. Since our group is the closest one to the school, 2 of the 7 going are: Rugby, raised by Frances Lucus, and Buddy, raised by Jackie Jordan. The Suncoast Puppy Raisers are proud to send 2 of our best to another school, but I’m sure Jackie and Frances can see the advantage of attending puppy graduation in Florida rather than New York! Buddy and Rugby will be arriving by October 13<sup>th</sup> and we will keep you posted on their progress.

## *Graduation*

We are proud to announce that Mac, raised by Joe and Fran Merle was matched and graduation was September 24<sup>th</sup>. Mac was matched to a first time guide dog user who happens to live in Port St. Lucy. The Merle’s were able to attend the graduation and had a chance to meet with Keith and see Mac in action. Although the trip was short and the Merle’s ended up spending the night in the airport because they were flying stand by, they still were glad they were able to attend and felt very gratified about their puppy raising experience. Congratulations to all, and Joe and Fran, we hope you continue to be a part of our group even if you are not raising a pup!



**Keith Mac and the Merle’s at GDF during Keith and Mac’s Graduation Celebration!**

## *Training Up Date*

Essie, raised by the Thompsons, has only been at the school for a month and we got a good progress report on her training. Her trainer said that Essie can be a little vocal in the kennel, (imagine that), has good obedience and had no negative reaction to some balloons. She will need to get more used to the feel of the harness and was introduced to some platform work. “Good Girl” Essie, we know you’ll get the hang of it!

## *Zoo Project Continues*

Good news, we heard from Dr. Kilmer, CEO of Lowry Park Zoo, and he is ready for us to continue with the Zoo Project. Starting in November, he would like to do three to four more sessions continuing to desensitize the animal collection to the pups and introduce the pups to the Park’s new tram. The sessions will be during the week and will last about an hour. We will send out specific dates and times as we schedule them.

## *Up Coming Events*

**October 22<sup>nd</sup>, Blessing of the animals:** Crystal Beach Community Church Fall Festival: The festival runs from 9:00am until 2:00pm with a formal “Blessing of the Animals,” ceremony planned around noon in the church’s prayer garden. All are welcome.

**“Wag O Ween”:** Saturday October 22<sup>nd</sup> 10:00am – 2:00pm: Treasure Island Community Park: We will have a table at this event so we will be asking for volunteers. So dress your puppy up in their best costume and enjoy the festivities.

## *The Passing of a Good Friend*

Sadly, on September 12, 2016, we learned of the passing of Mike Sergeant. The name may not be familiar to all, but we know him best as the founder of Southeastern Guide Dogs. We met Mike when we became puppy raisers and grew to love and respect him as we volunteered at the school. We watched him pour his heart and soul into building the school. Mike loved dog training and had been training dogs since his work with search & rescue/drug sniffing dogs in Viet Nam. In 1972 he became a qualified guide dog instructor and worked for Guiding Eyes for the Blind in Yorktown Heights, NY. In 1980, he was hired by Pilot dogs in Columbus Ohio. There he continued training, supervised apprentice trainers and headed the puppy program.

By 1982, Mike had 12 years in the field and came to a realization. All the existing guide dog schools were located in northern states or California. Dogs, like people become adapted to the environment and many have trouble adapting to a dramatically different environment such as Florida. Any blind person living in the south had no choice but to go to a northern state to get their guide dog. When returning home, it became evident that some dogs could not adapt to the heat, humidity and severe thunderstorms that are part of living in Florida. Mike felt that a school based in Florida where the puppies could be born and raised in the environment in which they would work was a logical conclusion. So, he and his wife Jan moved to Palmetto and with the help of the Bradenton Lions they acquired a small plot of land, a modest house and a hand selected group of pups to train.

With any new enterprise especially one of this size and scope, there were a lot of struggles, the greatest of which being financial ones. With the help of the local community and some very prominent business people, Mike was able to pioneer the development of a new regional guide dog school. In the next 20 years, Mike would oversee the creation of: a board of directors, development department, established a training department, breeding program, puppy raising program, and layered the foundation for acquiring funds through grants, wills and fund raising for a major expansion of the facilities.

The Freedom Walk was named after Mike Sergeant's beloved block head Labrador he brought in with the first string of dogs. The dog as well as the name, Freedom, became Mike's anthem. His first love had always been training, but the growing demands of Southeastern required him to do primarily administrative duties. Since this was not his strong suit and the school continued to grow, reluctantly, Mike left to pursue what he did the best, train guide dogs.

In 2003, Wells Jones, CEO of Guide Dog Foundation, with full recognition of Mike's talents brought him aboard. Chuck and I continued to follow his work at GDF and the fact that he went there after leaving Southeastern was a determining factor to our agreeing to coordinate a puppy group for GDF after we left Southeastern in 2011. We lost track of him and had heard he retired, but we never forgot him or the impact he has had in the guide dog community.

Mike Sergeant's accomplishments in training guide dogs could fill a book, and would take a great amount of time. With 40 years of experience, it's hard to highlight all he has done. I want to thank Wells Jones for sending me the following so I can at least honor Mike's memory in this way.

### *Vita of R. Michael Sergeant*

*Nationally recognized as an innovative and effective leader in the guide dog industry. Sergeant is respected for making a difference in the lives of people with disabilities using carefully and creatively trained dogs.*

#### EXPERIENCE

##### GUIDE DOG FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND, INC.

##### *2003-Present Chief Training Officer*

- Oversees training programs, regional staff and Consumer Services Department.
- Under Sergeant's leadership, the Guide Dog Foundation has expanded its programs to provide service, therapy and companion dogs.

- *Sergeant has also been instrumental in developing programs for veterans and the military under America's VetDogs.*
- *Committed to the highest quality of service, Sergeant has worked to tailor and expand the programs to meet the changing individual needs of our consumers.*

2003-2006      ***Southern Regional Manager***

- *Conducts home trainings, applicant interviews and aftercare visits*
- *Provides outreach and support to our blind and visually impaired consumers – and potential consumers – in the Southern region of the United States*
- *Facilitates special needs program that serves seniors and people who are blind and have multiple disabilities*
- *Assists in the fund-raising efforts in the region*
- *Facilitates Capable Canines Program that serves people with disabilities other than blindness*

1983-2003                      *SOUTHEASTERN GUIDE DOGS, INC.*      *Palmetto, Florida*

***Executive Director, C.O.O.***

- *Pioneered the development of a new, regional guide dog school*
- *Oversaw the creation of the Board of Directors, Training Department and Development Department*
- *Supervised multi-million dollar capital expansion program of growing facilities*
- *Responsible for the generation of significant monies from grants, wills and fund-raising programs*
- *Supervised the formation of a Graduate Council affording graduates a “voice” in the programs*
  
- *Implemented a home service training program for blind students in their home-based area*
- *Developed a comprehensive program specifically for people with multiple disabilities including blindness*
- *Developed a secondary program providing career change dogs to disabled people as therapy, companion and service dogs.*
- *Developed two regional satellite school – thus, bringing the training programs to the blind applicant*

1980 – 1982                      *PILOT DOGS*                                      *Columbus, Ohio*

- *Headed the puppy program*
- *Supervised apprentice trainers*
- *Trained dogs for the blind*
- *Worked with students*

1972-1979                      *GUIDING EYES FOR THE BLIND*                                      *Yorktown Heights, New York*

- *Qualified instructor*
- *Team captain*
- *Supervised apprentice trainers*
- *Worked with students*

**AFFILIATIONS/AWARDS**

- Served as Chairman for two years for the Council of United States Dog Guide Schools
- Lions Club International – multiple offices

### MILITARY SERVICE

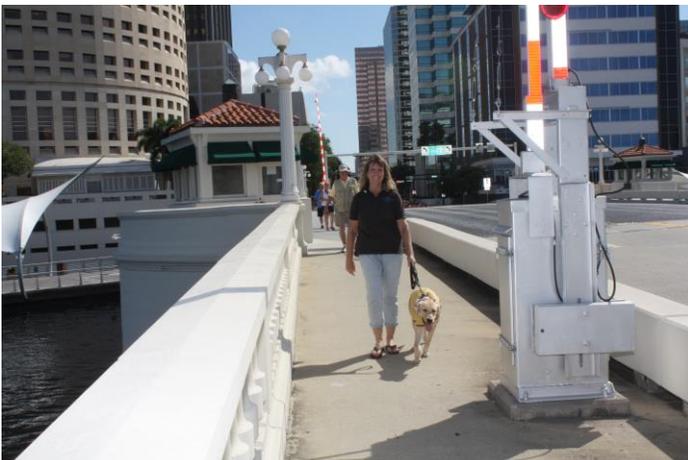
1968-1972 USAF

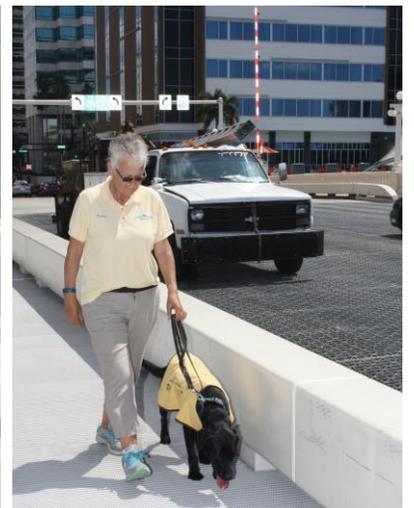
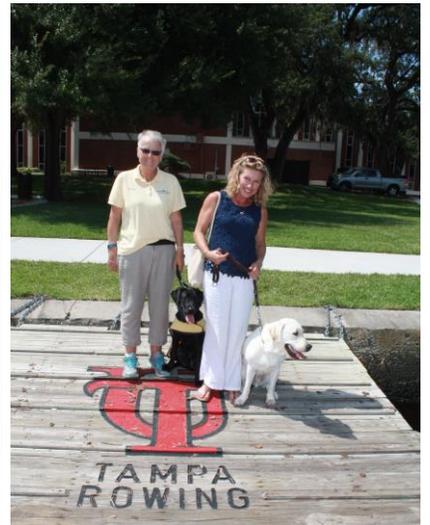
- E-5
- Dog Handler – Search and Rescue, Drug Sniffing
- First Pacific Air Command Narcotics Handler

Rest in peace Mike. The world is a better place because of you and the world of Guide Dogs and the visually impaired that use them are definitely better because of you and your dedication to the cause. Your friends Debbie and Chuck Hietala and all the Suncoast Puppy Raisers past present and future. Without you we would not be doing what we do. Thank you Mike.

### Photos of last month at University of Tampa

We had a lot of good photos last month at UT. Since we are already over our normal format I will use the rest of this page and 1 more for the photos. Hope you enjoy them. Your Area Coordinators Debbie and Chuck.





Suncoast Puppy Raisers  
 Area Coordinators:  
 Chuck and Debbie Hietala  
 Email: [Chuck@Suncoastpup.org](mailto:Chuck@Suncoastpup.org)  
 Website: [www.suncoastpup.org](http://www.suncoastpup.org)  
 Phone: 727-515-2105



Guide Dog Foundation  
 371 East Jericho Turnpike  
 Smithtown, NY 11787  
 Phone: (800) 548-4337  
 Fax: (631) 930-9009  
 Website: [www.guidedog.org](http://www.guidedog.org)