

Freedom Forum *A celebration of those dedicated to our mission to partner guide dogs with the visually impaired through Hometown Training, and the members of those special partnerships.*



A Milestone of Freedom & Independence

Nestled on four acres on a hillside in Cassville, New York, Freedom Guide Dogs for the Blind appears like a modern oasis in the midst of rural farmland. Now celebrating its 25th anniversary, it has gone from meager beginnings to servicing 244 clients in 15 states.

donated, and Sharon and Eric contributed their time and vehicles. A longtime friend of Sharon's, well known in the dog show world, donated dogs for the foundation breeding stock and several dogs for training to get things off the ground. When the property was purchased, the storage area

temps, the 180 plus inches of snow each winter melts and slides off the roof to prevent damage. The kennel includes a facility to house 20 to 30 training dogs, a full kitchen for meal preparation, storage areas for food, supplies and equipment, a training room for indoor work in bad weather, and an attached, enclosed play yard with steps, ramps, platforms, and other learning tools. Training dogs make use of the play yard daily to exercise and interact with each other.



Four short years later the Looris built a puppy enrichment center. Attached to the office, which is attached to the Freedom house, the enrichment center can house up to four litters at a time, each with whelping boxes, heat lamps, and stage appropriate toys. Gentle music fills the air. As the puppies grow there are innovative learning devices with stairs, varied textured

Freedom co-founders Sharon and Eric Loori set out on their journey with guide dog training and breeding experience, a love of the Labrador breed, and their interest in bettering life for those who are visually impaired. Having worked for other guide dog schools, they saw a need to create a diverse alternative to other schools with the versatile Labrador retriever and to use the concept of training clients at home, known at Freedom as "Hometown Training™". The calm, unexcitable manner of the Labrador combined with training clients in their own neighborhood so they could maintain child care or work schedules was something not generally offered as Freedom became incorporated in 1992.

Choosing upstate New York was easy, as the Looris were moving back to Sharon's roots. Friends and family helped with seed money. Creation of the Freedom logo was

attached to the house was renovated with kennels that were also donated.

Six dogs were placed in New York state in Freedom's first year, doubled in the second year as their own breeding program was started under Sharon's watchful eye. Breeding was done carefully and in tandem with training so the rhythm of pups born and raised matched the need to be trained and placed each year. In addition, a smooth Collie was donated, trained and placed. It proved to be an excellent guide dog as it was smart, polite and easy to train, and one or two smooth Collies have continued to be placed each year.

As the need continued to grow and breeding and training was expanding, Freedom's state-of-the-art kennel was built in 2003. It's thoughtful design included radiant heat in the floors, barn shades on the windows and an insulated roof to prevent heat loss. With the aid of the sun and outside



Eric & Sharon Loori with Barbet puppies

under footings, and spring loaded platforms for independence and agility, a wobble board for balance, and a puppy maze with changeable walls to promote decision making. The attached fenced play yard has a six way tunnel to promote random decisions during play and toys hanging from above to encourage noticing things that are above eye level. Multi-textured floor mats are used for sensory education,

.....continued on page 2

and the pups are taken on walks to explore the country fields.

Eric learned early in his apprenticeship that there was a special need for people who had visual impairment and secondary disabilities. This created a niche for Freedom and its ability to train at home, and these individuals have begun seeking Freedom out as the school that will help with training in these instances. One of those clients is James Fair, who received his first Freedom guide dog in 2008. In 2003 he was walking back from military duty and a bomb exploded, leaving him with no sight and no hands. With assistance from his occupational therapist, training methods and equipment were adapted to his individual needs.

Through adaptive methods and special training techniques, Freedom has placed guide dogs with clients who are visually impaired and have multiple sclerosis, posttraumatic stress disorder, cerebral palsy, single and bilateral prosthetic legs, mild learning disabilities, the need for support canes, and requiring the use of a guide dog on the client's right side rather than the traditional left.

The continued increase in client applications, the diversification of clients, and the growing reputation of Freedom's breeding and training programs created a demand for training department growth. Only a few years after opening, requests for guide dogs had been coming in from surrounding states, many from people who could not spend weeks away from home to train and weren't a good match for a German shepherd. Over the years Freedom introduced additional breeds, a small percentage of which are placed from year to year, although the Looris' primary love is for their Labradors. Standard poodles were added eight to ten years ago for clients with allergies. White American shepherds were added for a small number of clients who insisted they wanted a guide with more presence than a Labrador. Barbets were added recently, as they are also non-allergenic; breeding is just beginning. And about two years ago an experimental Labrador and smooth Collie cross breeding produced the Freedom Lollie, a successful litter placed this spring as working guide dogs.

To keep up with demand, in 2009 Sharon and Eric welcomed world renowned trainer John Byfield and two new apprentices to Freedom. Until that time Sharon occasionally handled some training and local placements on top of breeding, phones, tech support and client/puppy raiser services.



John Byfield with Roger & Lobo

John's physical location aided Freedom in placing dogs in the southern states more easily, furthering Freedom's outreach. With internet outreach, social media and continuing demand, by 2012 Freedom placed 32 dogs in one year. Volunteer interest also expanded and while puppy raiser homes originally were only in New York, they now included Pennsylvania and, by 2012, Florida and Connecticut.

As the apprentices completed their programs, John Byfield could spend more time in the south.

In 2014 he was named Director of Southern Operations and could economically do placements from Florida north, while Eric and the newly graduated trainers placed from Maine south. Winter training is hard in New York, due to heavy snow, subzero temperatures and biting wind. If immobilized, training is

done in the household and office environment, and in malls if the roads are travelable.

Sharon and Eric enjoy creating invaluable guide dog teams and hearing about the companionship and adventures that they make possible. They have made many friends in the international guide dog world and have found the networking invaluable for breeding and training techniques, and Eric and John have had the honor of working with programs in other countries to share ideas. And Freedom has had the extreme benefit of the wisdom and experience of John Byfield, the oldest active Guide Dog Mobility Instructor in the world and winner of the 2008 Ken Lord award for the lifetime commitment of an individual who has served the international guide dog movement in an exemplary manner.

Currently Freedom is placing 36 guide dog teams per year, whelping six litters of pups, and sharing breeding stock or exchanging pups with several other guide dog schools in the US and other countries to maintain clean breeding lines.

This year Freedom Guide Dogs is celebrating 25 years, and there are 244 clients in 15 states and 70 puppy raisers in 5 states celebrating with them. As they reflect on where they have been, Sharon and Eric also plan their next steps toward the bright and exciting future of Freedom Guide Dogs.



What is April 26th?

April 26th is International Guide Dogs Day!

Guide dogs are among the most phenomenal animals on the planet. This day celebrates the importance of how they help the blind and visually impaired live their daily lives. Guide dogs are meticulously trained to cross roads safely, avoid obstacles, use public transportation, and adapt to other needs of their handler. Watching a guide and handler and their dedication to each other is nothing short of amazing.

On International Guide Dogs Day we will honor guide dogs, as well as the patient people who train them, and celebrate the role they each play in society. The celebration will be worldwide!

How will you celebrate on April 26th? Here are some suggestions:



* Explain what Freedom does to someone you know who is visually impaired.

* See that your dog is on leash in public and taught not to distract or approach working dogs.

* Teach children about the job guide dogs do and that they shouldn't endanger it's handler by disturbing it while it's working.

* Send a donation to Freedom Guide Dogs so we can continue breeding, raising, training and placing guide dogs with those who need them.

Thank you for joining the celebration! ♥

Are you an Amazon shopper? You can help Freedom by shopping at [Amazon Smile](http://smile.amazon.com) instead. Type <http://smile.amazon.com> into your browser, choose Freedom Guide Dogs as your charity of choice and shop as you normally would. When you complete your purchase, Amazon will donate 0.5% of what you spend to Freedom! ♥



Wish List



- * Donate gift cards for Staples, PetSmart, Pet Supplies Plus, Petco or gas stations
- * Donate frequent flyer miles
- * Donate hotel room discounts
- * Hold a fundraiser
- * Sponsor, name or raise a puppy
- * Volunteer
- * Remember Freedom in your will



FREEDOM GUIDE DOGS

www.CharityWicks.com/freedomguide POWERED BY CHARITY WICKS MAKE THE IMPACT

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Looking Forward...

The need for fully trained guide dogs is staggering and continues to grow. Help Freedom Guide Dogs to provide services perpetually by:

- Donating appreciated assets such as stocks and bonds;*
- Remembering Freedom Guide Dogs in your estate planning;*
- Using matching donation programs available at work;*
- Notifying us of your employer's charitable foundations.*

And members of Thrivent Financial can recommend that a portion of

Thrivent's charitable funds go to Freedom! See www.thrivent.com/making-a-difference/living-generously/thrivent-choice/

The time to choose how you're giving is while you are living. Many thanks for aiding Freedom in providing independence and safety for future generations. Email info@freedomguidedogs.org for more info.

Placements!

Congratulations to our graduates who started adventures with new Freedom guide dogs this past fall! We wish them great travels! Stepping out into their future are.....

- Andrea and Hank, yellow Labrador, NY
- Cathy and Ulani, yellow Labrador, MA
- Esther and Tessa, black Labrador, MA
- Greg and Samson, black Poodle, FL
- Helen and Uber, black Labrador, PA
- Karen and Vera, black Labrador, NY
- Lisa and Tiger, black Labrador, NY
- Pam and Ume, black Labrador, CT
- Stephanie and Teddy, black Labrador, SC
- Barbara and Tara, black Labrador, NY
- Janice and Tia, yellow Labrador, FL
- Tony and Unagi, black Labrador, NY
- Rachel and Venus, black Labrador, MA
- Wayne and Maverick, yellow Labrador, KY

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We think It's Magic...

Lenny was born with retinitis pigmentosa, affecting his peripheral and night vision. The genetic disorder affected many of the men in his family.

Mainstreamed in school, Lenny faced many challenges. Encouraged by his guidance counselor, he graduated high school and then worked at a lamp factory. Not feeling challenged, he went for vocational testing that led him to the Computer Systems Institute in Pittsburgh.

Program completed, Lenny's next stop was the Pennsylvania Department of Highways, where he worked for 31 years. While there he earned many awards including the Governor's Most Outstanding Handicapped Employee of the Year and the Star of Excellence for outstanding service. The Secretary of Transportation said, "Lenny isn't getting this award because of his disability, he's getting it in spite of it."

Lenny was the first blind person in Pennsylvania Jaycee history to be president of a non-handicapped chapter. He became an amateur HAM radio operator and an avid bass fisherman, rode horses, and jumped from an airplane at 8,200 feet. And he became one of three blind magicians in the country!

Magic interested Lenny since he borrowed his first book from the library, 101 Magic Tricks, as a small child. In the 1980s, using small illusions, he began doing magic for those he knew. "I saw the irony of using magic to illustrate that being blind wasn't going to stop me from pursuing my interests. When a magician performs, he depends on the fact that he can

see what he's doing and the audience can't. In my case, the audience

can see what I'm doing but I can't. A successful magician lets the audience witness the magic without revealing his secrets."

In late 1995 Lenny's arms and legs became dysfunctional, and corrective cervical surgery left him paralyzed from the neck down. With determination, faith in God and his sense of humor his rehabilitation was swift and miraculous, inspiring others.

Postsurgical limitations left Lenny unable to travel independently with a cane. Turned down by other guide dog schools, he turned to Freedom at the advice of a friend and received a dog named Indy. "Before Indy I needed someone to drive me to the barbershop, and it would take an hour to walk home. With Indy that



Lenny and Otter

walk was 15 minutes."

This newfound independence and personal willpower even got Lenny back to work.

Lenny has had three successor dogs from Freedom

over the years: Micah, Toga and now Otter. He feels it will take about six months for he and Otter to be a trusting team, like dancing with a new partner. He feels that a guide dog gives him confidence venture out and broaden his world.

With guide dog Toga, Lenny participated in the "Walk a Mile in Her Shoes" fundraiser, raising awareness for victims of sexual abuse. Lenny once walked wearing yellow peep-toe glittered pumps, complete with painted toenails and pantyhose! "Any day I can make someone laugh is a good day, any day I can help someone is a great day, and any day I can do both is a perfect day!" He became their largest fundraiser with his infectious enthusiasm.



Lenny and Otter

Several years ago Lenny returned to magic, learning to compensate for his limited arm movement. His Motivational Magic shows prove that you can overcome disability, and raise donations for Freedom.

Lenny's current hobby is woodworking with power tools. His theory is "I'd rather do something and get hurt than sit feeling sorry for myself." This mantra has gotten him through life.

Lenny and Otter will surely have many new adventures together. "Otter is doing so very well," Lenny says. "I actually see the best of my three previous dogs in him. That is a dream come true!"

We think it might be MAGIC. ♥

With your support, Freedom and independence is possible!

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Make checks payable to:

Freedom Guide Dogs, 1210 Hardscrabble Rd., Cassville, NY 13318

Save time, donate online! www.freedomguidedogs.org