

LEADER DOGS FOR THE BLIND'S PATRIOTIC PUPPY DAY

BY FERNANDO J. FERNANDEZ

The 10th Annual Puppy Day at Leader Dogs for the Blind in Rochester, Michigan, had both a significant relevance for Lions and somewhat of a patriotic mien in view of the participation of the United States Customs Service. The event took place at the 58-year-old school on August 9, 1997, and was attended by 80 puppy breeders and "foster parents" of dogs, nearly 400 Lions and their families, special guests, children, members of the news media, friends of the school and, most importantly, 200 puppies.

Also present were several blind individuals from the United States, Canada and Mexico, including Larry Colbert, a vice district governor from Arizona, who served as guest speaker. He explained how vital the puppy breeders are to the overall success of the Leader Dog program. A highlight of the event was the graduation ceremony for the latest class of 26 blind students and their dogs. Among the graduates was Liz Coronado, who teaches the blind in Mexico and was teamed with her fourth dog, thanks to the sponsorship of Multiple District B.

Assisting throughout the day were 54 Lions from Indiana whose services included registration, tours of the entire facility, parking cars and coordination of the cook-out for all guests. Supervising this activity were Past District 25-C Governor Larry Henry, who now serves as chairman of Indiana Lions for Leader Dogs, Inc.; Past District 25-A Governor Greg Kochele, vice-chairman, and Secretary Tom Kimbale. In telling how the Lions of Indiana have been involved with the school for 20 years, they emphasized that their state was the first to adopt it as a multiple district project after Michigan.



A KEY POINT IN THE TRAINING IS TO ENSURE THAT THE DOG KEEPS ITS MIND ON LEADING THE PERSON. OUTSIDE DISTRACTIONS, SUCH AS RABBITS OR UMBRELLAS, CANNOT INTERFERE.



"Our organization," stated Lion Kochele, "is composed of the eight districts in the state with three trustees elected from each. The 24 trustees meet four times a year to determine present requirements at the school and plan for the future. For example, we recently voted to establish an emergency fund to meet urgent needs."

A primary objective of Indiana Lions for Leader Dogs is locating blind people around the state who express a desire to enter training at the school. In addition, the Hoosier Lions search out potential puppy breeders and foster parents, promote the Leader Dog program in schools, nursing homes, shopping centers and, of course, at Lions club meetings. They also raise a generous amount of funds each year for the school.

"We visit each Lions club in Indiana at least once every three years," continued Kochele, "and we always try to bring a team from Leader Dogs with us. Our efforts are obviously successful because all clubs in the state now donate to the school. We average between \$80,000 and \$100,000 annually, making Indiana one of the top ten states in the nation in contributions."

Indiana Lions are also proud that of the more than 11,000 teams that have graduated from Leader Dogs, 705 of the blind individuals were from their state. But other than the graduates, Kochele emphasized that the voluntary puppy breeding program has been the state's most successful and useful means of support for the school.

Presently, there are about 400 young dogs in foster homes throughout the country being trained for eventual, and hopeful, acceptance by Leader Dogs School. This number is necessary if the school is able to graduate 300 teams a year.

Puppy Program Director Samantha Ziegenmeyer expressed her satisfaction with the program's success and the importance of the annual Puppy Day. "The purpose of this day is to bring together the voluntary breeders and their young dogs in order



THE FRIENDLY PUPPIES WERE POPULAR WITH THE MANY CHILDREN WHO ATTENDED THE EVENT.

to evaluate the puppies in determining their future capacity for training. The day also serves as an excellent opportunity for everyone, including staff, to become better acquainted with one another. After touring the school," she continued with confidence, "everyone will be completely impressed with its perfect condition and the manner in which it is able to function—the kennels, the veterinary services, classrooms, harnesses shop, recreation and dining rooms, student dormitories and administrative offices, and, of course, everyone will be delighted by the spirit of teamwork our staff exhibits."

She concluded by noting the results of the strict evaluations. "Of the 200 puppies evaluated, 100 percent passed all the tests."

During the afternoon, Leader Dogs for the Blind President Bill Hansen chaired a recognition ceremony on the landscaped grounds adjacent to the dormitories. Hansen is a past president of the Rochester Lions Club and a past region chairman in District 11-A2. He awarded diplomas to a number of puppy breeders, many of whom were Lions, in recognition of their success in raising potential Leader Dogs. "I am especially pleased," he said "to recognize Nan Nellenbach who, in 25 years, has bred 43 puppies and enthusiastically continues with her very decisive voluntary service." Tents were erected on the grounds for guests to enjoy the cook-out and for the conduct of the puppies' evaluation tests.

Helping to coordinate the day's activities was Carlos Gallusser, bilingual translator and representative for the school around the world. "The puppy program," he pointed out, "provides Leader Dogs not only for blind students in the United States, but throughout Canada, Latin America, Europe, the Far East, Africa...in fact, anywhere we find the Lions banner."

CUSTOMS SERVICE PARTICIPATES

The "patriotic" part of Puppy Day was the participation of the United States Customs Service. Attendees learned how Leader Dogs not only assist blind people, but also team with the government in its crusade against drug abuse. Officer Paul Paulson, U.S. Customs Service special agent and instructor of dogs trained in drug searching, represented the agency and explained how the quality

breeding and training at Leader Dog School enables the animals to serve not only as dog guides, but in various other functions also, such as drug sniffers.

"We at the Customs Service," said Paulson, who is stationed at Front Royal, Virginia, "are very appreciative of the 20 to 30 dogs that are donated by Leader Dog School each



A VISITING LION IS MASKED TO UNDERSTAND HOW A DOG IS USED. WITH THE TEAM IS INSTRUCTOR ART FLEMING.

year to help us in our fight against drugs at border crossings, maritime ports and airports. Not a day goes by without Customs dogs intercepting contraband drugs concealed in cargo crates, on people, in passenger baggage, in vehicles crossing the Mexican or Canadian borders and in other forms of transportation."

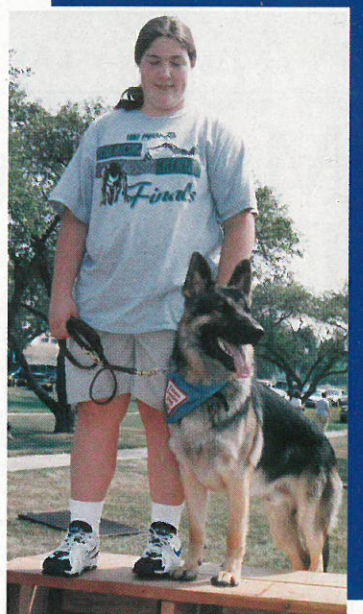
After assuring those present that Customs Service dogs are not trained by giving them drugs, agent Paulson clarified the matter. "When we obtain a Career Change Dog (one that did not qualify to be a Leader Dog for a blind person), we train the animal for several weeks by having it become familiar with the scent of different drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, heroin and others. These dogs are fantastic! They get so proficient in sniffing out even the smallest portion of a drug that nothing illegal can get through undetected by them."

When the Customs' dogs are ready for their delicate work, they are assigned to one of the many ports, airports or border crossings in the United States. Added Paulson: "Leader Dogs for the Blind should be very proud of its patriotic service in providing us with such intelligent German shepherds, labradors and golden retrievers who facilitate our task of detecting drug smugglers."

President Hansen replied, "I am very pleased with the patriotic service of Leader Dogs to our country. As a Lion and as a citizen, I am strongly against drugs, their distribution and use in the United States."

(If Lions, clubs or districts are interested in any of the programs offered by Leader Dogs for the Blind, they are welcome to write or call the school at: 1039 S. Rochester Road, Rochester, Michigan 48307. Phone: 248-651-9011 or toll free: 1-888-777-5332. Fax: 248-651-5812.)

Editor's Note: The author is the editor of the Spanish language edition of THE LION Magazine.



A BREEDER PUTS A GERMAN SHEPHERD THROUGH ITS PACES TO DEMONSTRATE HOW WELL THE DOG HAS RESPONDED TO TRAINING.



SHOWN FROM LEFT, ARE LEADER DOGS PRESIDENT BILL HANSEN, U.S. CUSTOMS SERVICE SPECIAL AGENT PAUL PAULSON AND STEVE SOLVOLD, LEADER DOGS KENNEL MANAGER.