

Published
Since 1983

Gary & Diana Ditto's Newsletter

November-December 2018

Guiding Eyes for the Blind

by Antoinette Kranenburg

Elijah quietly lies waiting by the café table outside the Kensington Old Town Market. To most, he appears to be at rest. However, in fact the young, slim, black Labrador Retriever is at work, attending to his trainer Jean Silverman. Sparrows are flying on and off, hopping around nearby looking for crumbs. Birds are very interesting to Elijah, and he keeps an eye on them, but he does not let himself get distracted. He is working!

Elijah is a puppy-in-training for Guiding Eyes for the Blind.

Elijah has been with volunteer puppy raiser Jean Silverman since he was 7 ½ weeks old. Even then, when Elijah came to Jean, he already had skills. In fact, Jean explains, the puppies often have more skills at 7 ½ weeks than their volunteer puppy raiser does. The photo on the right shows Elijah shortly after he arrived.

Elijah came from New York where Guiding Eyes breeds Labs and German Shepherds to be raised as guide dogs for visually impaired and legally blind people.

The puppies are bred to work. The goal is that they will work as guide dogs. From birth to 16 weeks, puppies experience rapid brain development. Guide dogs must greet myriad situations with equanimity and control. The best preparation is to be exposed to a large variety of experiences at the earliest age possible.



— Continued on page2

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— *Guiding Eys continued*

Volunteers begin to work with them immediately — touching them, rubbing them, whispering their name, and exposing them to sounds. By three weeks, when puppies begin to hear, they are called by their name.

At 7 weeks, the puppies are selected on how they respond to an exam. Curiosity and calmness are desirable. At 7 to 8 weeks old, when the puppies arrive at their volunteer puppy raisers, they already know to sit for their meal, and to wait to be released!

No experience with dogs is necessary to volunteer as a puppy raiser, nor do you need to have a fenced yard. The only requirement is three pre-placement classes that explain Guiding Eyes' mission and how raising a guide dog is different from having a pet.

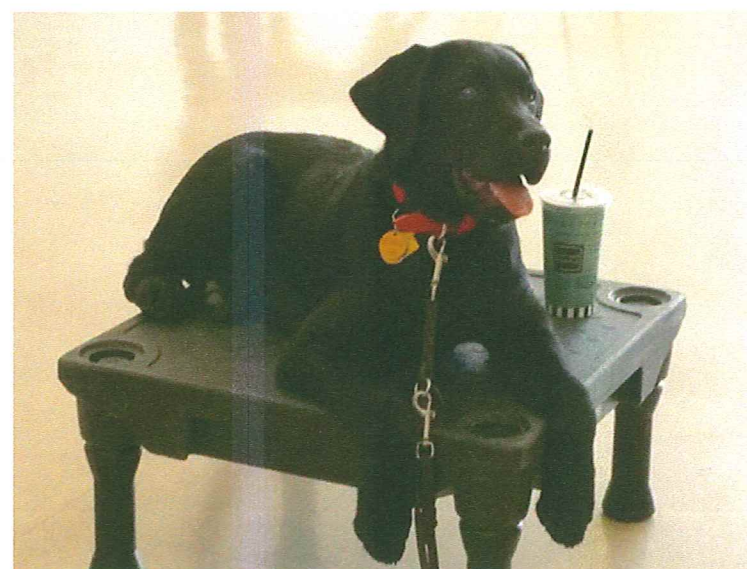
Puppy raisers are a diverse group: couples, families with children, young adults, and senior citizens; urban, suburban, and rural; living in apartments, town-homes, and single family homes.

Jean Silverman grew up in Silver Spring and has lived in Kensington for 40 years. She loves it here — the people, the schools, and being close to Rock Creek Park and hiking. She is a nurse and works at Georgetown Hospital two days a week.

For years Jean volunteered as a Girl Scout leader, until her daughter's troop graduated. She saw an ad for Guiding Eyes Montgomery County region in the Gazette. She liked dogs, and that is how she got started as volunteer puppy raiser.

Since she started to volunteer in 2008, Jean Silverman has raised 13 dogs and has learned a lot. She has also become certified as a dog trainer.

Guide dogs are quite different from pets. They are bred to work and have "high initiative," meaning that they like to be active and to have a job to do. Elijah wears a jacket, both as a sign that he is working and for publicity.



Elijah taking a break during training class.

When young, the puppies are trained to be comfortable in a crate. The puppies are not allowed on the furniture, or to sleep with the trainer, or to take food from the counter. They have to learn to be idle.



Jean teaches Elijah by catching him when he is doing well, and giving him attention and a food reward — some kibble from a pouch she wears on her belt. The approach is not punitive; no choke chains are used. When Elijah makes a bad choice, he won't get her attention or a reward. Jean wants to work as a team with her dog.

For the first 4 to 6 months, there is a one-hour class every Sunday with 6 to 8 other dogs who are in training. Now Elijah goes to class every other Sunday. In a few more months Elijah will go to New York to take the "In For Training" exam. If he passes he will start formal guide-dog training.

There are many ways to get involved with Guiding Eyes, from making fleece toys to puppy sitting. Puppy sitters give a puppy raiser a break, something the sitters can do on their own schedule. Some puppy raisers "start" or "finish" a puppy or help as assistants in the puppy training classes.

Jean finds that teens make some of the best raisers — they are busy and fold the puppies into their lives. Teens are also used to being coached and to taking direction, and don't take it personally.

Jean's son took on raising a puppy while in scouting. He included the experience in his college application. Young people earn the Presidential Volunteer Service award and SSL hours.

After completing formal guide-dog training, the dogs are matched with visually impaired, legally blind graduates, who have completed their own training. Among reasons for the need for these dogs are macular degeneration and diabetes. A cane is good, but it can be limiting and tiring. A dog is faster. The speed of the dog is matched to the graduate. Dogs may need additional skills. For example, a person may be visually impaired and may also use a walker. Dogs may need to learn to open the fridge, or pick up keys.

Not all the dogs make it through the training to become working guide dogs. Training costs \$50,000 per dog. All is free of charge to the participants. At any time during the training process a dog can fail to complete the guide dog training. Those wonderful dogs become working dogs in other important ways.

— *Guiding Eys continued*

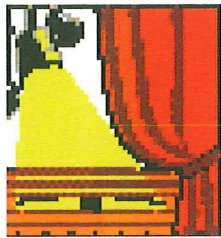
At the end of training, the dog is given the responsibility for a person. Jean remembers a dog who had done a great job all along, but failed in that final phase. Having the responsibility worried her. She showed her worry to her trainer by walking him into a low-hanging wire.

There is a long waitlist for the dogs who don't make it to becoming a guide dog. They are working for agencies such as the Connecticut ATF, State Police, a detective agency, for drug sniffing, and some work the theatre circuit, sniffing for explosives.

Jean has four dogs at the moment. These include Jesse, Sam, and retiree Patriot. They do wonderful work as therapy dogs.

Guiding Eyes does presentations. These have included a stress break for an accounting firm during tax time, visits to Montgomery College during exam time, and a birthday. It is win-win. People enjoy it and it is a great learning and training opportunity for the puppies-in-training.

Visit www.guidingeyes-md.org for more information, including photos of the most endearing local puppies-in-training imaginable!



The British Players present:

Frosted

A Traditional British Pantomime
November 30 – December 16, 2018
Kensington Town Hall

3710 Mitchell Street, Kensington
Tickets: 240-447-9863 - www.britishplayers.org

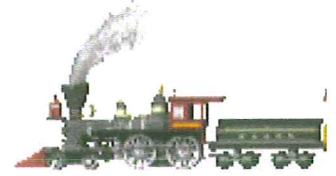
Pantomime, or “Panto,” is a British holiday season tradition. Enjoyed by children and adults alike, the performances incorporate song, dance, buffoonery, slapstick, in-jokes, and mild innuendo. Audience participation is especially encouraged. Children love to interact with the cast, and get involved in a way that doesn't happen with more conventional theatre.

Frosted tells the tale of two Princesses who will stop at nothing to look after each other. One struggles to come to terms with the magical powers she has been given. The other yearns to explore beyond the castle walls. Can they survive the snowstorm? Will they ever find true love? Or will their kingdom be taken over by a wicked Prince?

Gary and Diana Ditto's Newsletter welcomes ideas and news items from community members. We are grateful to Jean Silverman for sharing her enthusiasm as a guide dog volunteer and her photos and to Susan Wranik. The editor is Antoinette Kranenburg of Kensington, assisted by Cherry Wunderlich.

Surprising Model Train Show Outcome

The small wooden train whistles—a new 4-tone version—given out at September's Kensington Train Show, sounded especially good. For



Kensington residents Linda and Takeo Nishoka, that set off a light bulb! What if these whistles were used at the Parkinson's communication group, a fun way to strengthen breath support?

Gary and Diana Ditto loved the idea. They gave the Nishokas enough whistles for everyone in the group.

The communication group meets every Wednesday afternoon at Kensington Park Senior Living and is open to the public. The group is intended for people with Parkinson's and people having challenges with making themselves heard. The facilitator is Susan I. Wranik, a board-certified speech-language pathologist and LSVT® certified clinician.

People may notice the tremor and shuffling gait of Parkinson's disease, but they are often unaware of the hard-to-hear voice, which can be one of the most debilitating aspects of the disease.

“If people can't hear you, they assume you don't know,” explains Wranik, “To be louder, you need greater respiratory support – more air.” Enter the train whistles.

Next time you hear the whistle blow, it may be Kensington Park's Communication Club working on being LOUDER and making their voices heard.

Kensington's Town Dance

Wednesday, November 21
7 – 11 p.m.

Kensington Town Hall
3710 Mitchell Street, Kensington

Free and featuring:

The Nighthawks!!

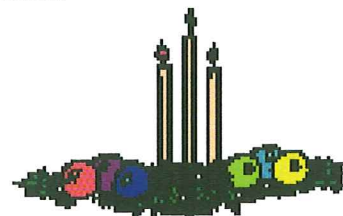
Antique Row

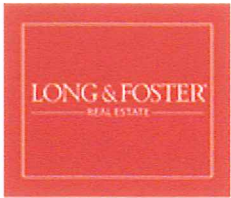
Holiday Open House

7 - 9 p.m.

Friday, December 7, 2018

Enjoy the festive holiday season on Antique Row. Stores will be open, providing refreshments, live music, and holiday cheer.





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The Ditto Group Real Estate Activity



10005 Kensington Pkwy
Kensington/Kensington
Sold - \$910,000



9508 E. Bexhill Dr
Kensington/Rock Creek Hills
Sold - \$ 840,000



3904 Dresden St.
Kensington/Chevy Chase
View
Active - \$795,000



3005 Oak St.
Kensington/Kensington View
Active - \$ 739,000



5113 Flanders Ave
Kensington/Garrett Park
Estates
Under Contract - \$ 635,000



9912 E. Bexhill Dr
Kensington/Rock Creek Hills
Sold - \$610,000
(Home suffered structural
damage from fallen tree)



4206 Brookfield Dr
Kensington/Kensington Estates
Active - \$ 595,000



10206 Grant Ave
Capitol View Park
Active - \$550,000



3917 Denfeld Ave
Kensington/Rock Creek
Palisades
Sold - \$ 550,000



11015 Glueck Ln
Kensington/North Kensington
Active - \$ 469,000



2911 Barker St
Capitol View Park
Under Contract
List Price - \$ 459,000



19348 Elderberry Terr.
Germantown
Sold - \$ 235,000