

Student finds her passion working with animals

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Puppy raiser Taylor kneels and hugs her guide puppy in training, Judson.

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Before coming into college, I knew for my career I wanted to work with animals, whether it be service animals, therapy work, and even animal assisted psychotherapy. Throughout my college career, I have been a member of Guiding Eyes for the Blind Southern Tier region here at Alfred University, and have been able to get a better idea of how I would like to help others with the use of animals.

Being on both Equestrian Teams I had come into Alfred interested in equine psychotherapy, but found Guiding Eyes to be the perfect route to connect to my passion, at the moment. I puppy sat and handled a lot of dogs to help prepare myself for raising a dog myself which I had planned on doing spring semester of my junior year. February of 2017, I was told that I would be getting a puppy that next week, Judson, who would be with me for about 15 months. Little did I know that Judson inspired me to continue raising after college, as I now plan for puppy number two.

Judson, 6J417 a black lab, whom I am raising through Guiding Eyes for the Blind has followed me through my last three semesters of my undergrad. 6J417 is his ID number, this means he was the sixth born in his litter, the fourth J litter of that year, and born in the year of 2017. It is good to memorize this ID when filling out paperwork and surveys throughout his raising journey. While this number identifies him, it cannot convey his wonderful personality and contagious happiness. Whether it be at the barn for riding practices four days a week, work at the Career Development Center, lunch at the dining hall, or going to class on campus, Judson is by my side. Through my busy schedule of being on both Hunt Seat and Western Equestrian Teams, working on my degree, and having a job, Judson gets to experience many socialization opportunities from week to week. Judson has learned to acclimate to many different

situations, whether it be at the barn watching horses get ridden during a practice, or working at the Career Development Center by helping put together career fairs, checking in students and alumni, or working on the latest project. Judson does a range of work, while living with me on campus. These experiences give Judson a foundation of confidence that will allow him to succeed in the future.

With Guiding Eyes being a non-for profit organization, raising is a volunteer based system. This is so that we can give those with vision loss the opportunity to work with a Guide dog. The cost for a fully trained guide dog can be up to \$50,000. This can limit the access of being able to obtain a guide dog. With the dedicated work from volunteers, individuals with vision loss receive our guide dogs for free. Many people with vision loss prefer guide dogs to canes because they are faster, more personable, and can offer an increased sense of independence. Barbara and her new Guide dog Chad stated, "I feel so much freer and confident since having guide dogs. They are more than a mobility aid- they've been companions that make my soul more complete." There is a lot of work behind the scenes to produce the best guide dogs possible through careful breeding, training, and care.

When it is time to return Judson back to Guiding Eyes for the Blind he will go through a process called IFT or In-For-Training. This will be the stage in his career where he decides what he would like to do. Judson will be asked to perform a series of tests in a controlled setting that evaluate his temperament, ability to adapt to unfamiliar people, dogs, and environments. However he reacts, it will decide what he truly wants to do with his career. If he is to have all of these qualities and show enthusiasm and desire to undertake the tasks of working in a harness then he will undergo guide dog training. If guide work is not his choice then there is a plethora of other jobs he can do to keep himself working and happy. This is why Guiding Eyes says that each dog "chooses its own career." Even though I do have to say goodbye to this lovely boy on May 14th, 2019 I am certain that whatever he does with his career, it will be done with a full heart.