COVID-19 and our Dogs

First and foremost, we hope everyone is staying safe, healthy and sane as we navigate the new normal during these unprecedented times. Covid-19 has shifted all our routines and the same is certainly true for OccuPaws. As we navigate through these changes, we appreciate all your kind words and support to help keep our dogs moving forward!

What’s in the Newsletter

1. PROFILE OF A TEAM
   Meet Renee & Wizard

2. MAKE A DIFFERENCE
   Interview with Evan & Emily on their raising experiences

3. BACK TOGETHER
   Stay safe until we can all be together again!

RAISE A PUPPY
Ready to change a life. Apply to be a raiser today!

VOLUNTEER
Can’t Raise a Puppy? Help support our mission by volunteering!

DONATE
Make a difference with a donation at www.occupaws.org
Renee & Wizard

Renee VanDoren lives in Skokie, IL with her husband. They have 3 girls ages 27 and 21 year old twins. Renee is a Licensed clinical social worker and Wizard is a male, two year old black Labrador retriever. He helps Renee get to work each day in the city. When they aren’t at the office together, they enjoy spending time with the family, going to the theatre and cheering on the Cubs!

How did you learn about OccuPaws?

I found out about Occupaws through research on the internet when I became interested in getting a guide dog. My overall experience with Occupaws has been supportive and positive. Although I had to wait for some time before a dog was placed with me, Wizard was more than worth the wait! I was originally drawn to Occupaws due to their individualized approach to placement and training teams in their home/working environment. As Wizard was my first guide dog, it was very helpful to learn and train in the actual environment where we would be working together. My experience with my GDMI/Trainer was one of the most positive pieces of this journey.

Do you have any advice for people seeking a dog?

Be patient! The wait can sometimes be long to get matched with your guide dog, but you never know when you’ll get the call that changes your life.
Volunteer Profile

Even and Emily live in Madison, WI and both just recently graduation from UW - Madison. They began volunteering with OccuPaws in January of 2019 and have raised 3 dogs and currently have one, Caramel, who is in harness training in North Carolina.

How did you learn about OccuPaws and why did you decide to get involved?

After graduation, I thought it would be the perfect for time for Evan and I to raise a puppy. At the same time, I was interested in pursuing orientation and mobility as a career. An O&M Specialist can help determine if a client is a good candidate to travel with a guide dog and can help prepare visually impaired individuals to become successful guide dog users. I searched online to see if there were any programs in Madison serving the blind and visually impaired community and found OccuPaws. Pups and profession-- OccuPaws is the perfect combination. Being able to raise and train the dogs provides an opportunity to form exceptional partnerships between the dogs, handlers, and within the OccuPaws community. Joining OccuPaws has been one of the most rewarding decisions we have ever made. It is not about the recognition, but rather what OccuPaws represents, and the impact we can make.

What do you enjoy most?

Building relationships with the dogs and OccuPaws volunteers is the most enjoyable aspect to us. There is nothing like the excitement of being told that you are going to be raising a puppy. With that comes a responsibility to do your best to help them on their journey to become a working guide, but it is also accompanied by the endless joy that a young Labrador brings into your home. In our experience so far, each dog has had their own, unique personality that makes every day more enjoyable than the last.

The community of OccuPaws volunteers is unlike any other. We are all in it together, from puppy raisers, to sitters, to those joining in during public events, and the individuals behind the mission. We advocate, we learn, we train all while having fun with people who are doing the same. Before joining OccuPaws, I don't think Evan and I would have thought that attending training classes and volunteer events would be what we looked forward to most in the week.

Bringing the puppies with us to work has been another enjoyable experience. When the hours of the day seem to be dragging on, there is nothing more comforting than looking under your desk and seeing a curled-up ball of sleepy puppy. It has been especially fun bringing the dogs on errands around the capitol square. We have had to deliver very important packages to the post office, gone through metal detectors to enter the courthouse, and had to be on our best behavior as we dropped off legal documents at several downtown law firms. Although sometimes the work week is long and the days seem even longer (especially to a 16 month old puppy), watching the dogs learn how to settle into the office life has been amazing as we know that they will be prepared for anything going forward no matter how boring it may seem.