

# Pawsitive News

OccuPaws.org



### Raise a Puppy

Are you ready to change a life??  
Apply to be a raiser or sitter today!



### Volunteer today

Can't raise or sit for a puppy, support our mission by volunteering!



### Donate

Make a difference by a monetary donation.

## In The Know

Want to help support OccuPaws but don't know how?? Stop by our events this summer!

The best way to keep up to date is our Facebook page, [facebook.com/OccuPawsguidedogs](https://facebook.com/OccuPawsguidedogs). We have many events scheduled in Lodi, Sauk City, Middleton, Lake Mills and plan to add more. See the last page for currently scheduled events.



### GDMI DENNIS

An interview with our lead Guide Dog Mobility Instructor, Dennis.



### VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Kaseman-Wold family of Madison, WI



### CLIENT PROFILE

Bonded pair, Leo & Angus

## Interview with GDMI Dennis

### Dennis Walker: Determination Personified

After an OccuPaws dog has been socialized and trained in basic commands by a half-dozen or so volunteers, the real work begins. GDMIs - certified Guide Dog Mobility Instructors - evaluate the dog, complete their harness training, and match them with a blind person.

OccuPaws' lead GDMI (who does most of the evaluating and who supervises the other GDMIs) is Dennis Walker. Which raises the question, *who is Dennis Walker?*

Dennis decided at the age of ten that he wanted to be a vet. As a kid he had gerbils, rabbits, parrots, dogs and cats. He lived in Westchester County, NY not far from **Guiding Eyes to the Blind**, and he often encountered dogs being trained. But it was his visits to the vet that really floated his boat.

By the time he graduated from high school, he decided he didn't want to be a vet after all. He hated school, and the thought of spending the better part of a decade in college didn't interest him. So, naturally, he moved to Oregon and worked as a housepainter.

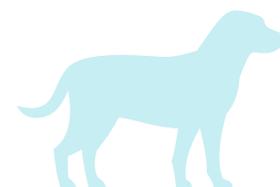
The thing is, it rains a lot in Oregon, so he had a lot of time on his hands. Eventually, he realized he needed to find a different field of work, so he turned to the local library, where he spent many hours scouring through books, looking for a new career. Finally, he found information about



### “They laughed at him!”

**Moorpark College** in southern California, which specialized in exotic animal training (think primates and large cats). In 1992, he applied, was accepted, and spent two years, seven days a week, living with and caring for animals in what was essentially a zoo, while taking academic courses. He was on a trajectory to work with **Animal Actors of Hollywood** (with whom he'd been volunteering), until his gut told him it wasn't the right path for him. He didn't like that the animals were basically merchandise. He tells the story of a black panther, isolated in its cage for two years without an acting contract, and whose lock had rusted from disuse.

After contemplating what to do next, he recalled the guide dog trainers he'd seen as a kid. He approached **Guide Dogs for the Blind**, the largest organization for training GDMIs, but they discouraged him, saying they had a long, long waiting list of applicants and he had little chance of getting an apprenticeship. Then he heard that the organization was planning on opening a **new campus in Oregon**, and he decided he would move back to Oregon, and somehow make them take him in.



He learned where the new campus was going to be built and kept an eye on it to see if work had started. After a year or so, he noticed some trees had been cut down. He learned they had rented an office nearby, so he went to the office, introduced himself and told the managers that he was going to get an apprenticeship and become a GDMI. **They laughed at him.** He kept going back and they kept laughing at him. When construction was finished, he filled out an application to work in the kennels, telling the people who hired him that they would eventually give him a GDMI apprenticeship. It took another year and a lot of kennels to be cleaned out, but through his persistence he was offered an apprenticeship. After completing the three-year program, Dennis Walker was a GDMI.

Dennis now works as an **independent** GDMI, one of the most respected in the country ... and beyond. In 2019 he spent several months working with dogs in **Hong Kong** and was scheduled to work in **Uruguay** for part of 2020 before, well, you know. Nonetheless, he's been honing his international bona fides through Zoom.

It takes commitment to do what we do as OccuPaws volunteers. It's nice to know that the end product of our work is handed off to someone who is perhaps the most committed of all.

*In the next newsletter, Dennis will share his thoughts about what he looks for when he evaluates an OccuPaws dog for harness training, and how he matches them with a blind client.*



## Volunteer Profile: The Kaseman-Wold's

### These Kids Started as Raisers At a Young Age

Your name and where you live: Beth, Peter, Ella (14) and Clara (11) Kaseman-Wold Madison, WI

**Tell us about yourself:** Peter's an arborist and we homeschool. The kids have always loved animals. During 2020 we added two goats and a house rabbit to the cats and gerbils. We don't have a pet dog. When Ella turned 7, we became volunteers for the Humane society and Ella and Clara helped a stray deliver 8 puppies in our laundry room. I thought we could check dogs off the list, but two years later Ella told me the **ONLY** thing she wanted for Christmas was a puppy. She was **SERIOUS**. I wanted another volunteer project, so when I saw the OccuPaws billboard, I knew I had to learn more! The first class both kids showed a lot of interest and way more skill than I, so we kept going.



**How long have you been involved with OccuPaws?** It's 5 years this month. I thought it was going to be a passing phase, but the longer we do this, the more we learn and the more we want to learn. We love being part of this community and sharing dogs with so many people. We had Topaz

right up until we took her to the airport to meet her GDMI (Guide Dog Mobility Instructor). Now it's fun to see her working (and relaxing) on Facebook (thanks to Susan!).

**Are you a raiser, sitter or both?** Both. The kids really love it when we have two dogs at once. It can be pretty wild and crazy, but also an opportunity to practice training dog reactivity, etc.

**How many dogs have you had?** Weston is #11 for us to raise. We lost track of how many we sat for. :)

**How many of those dogs have graduated and become working guide dogs?** Only Topaz so far, but we had Lava from 7 weeks to 7 months and she's in college now! We also had Newton before he went to prison and now he's with a GDMI as well. Watching the GDMI video clips on Facebook shows us how much some of these dogs WANT TO WORK!

**Any favorite stories?** Tesla as a tiny pup on the swim deck. She was SUCH a magnet I had to hide her or the kids wouldn't focus on their swimming.

Wonder refusing to potty train. I put him and Ella in the x-pen and turned on the 2016 Olympics for hours. That way he destroyed toys but didn't potty on the floor or mess up the house! :) When we went to class, he looked mellow compared to Wrigley and always came home tired after playing with his brother. :)

Clara learning to speak poodle from Faith at Boston Store Community Days. Don teaching Ella to groom poodles when we had Quinn. Potty training Lava in -50 windchill. She was SO quick and then jumped on our boot to let us know she was done and wanted to go in.

**How did you learn about OccuPaws and why did you decide to get involved?** The first time I heard about OccuPaws was when Barb and Mark did a demo at a homeschooling support group meeting in 2011. Mark and Barry led blindfolded Ella (age 5) around a park. Ella loved it. Clara was a baby then, but a billboard reminded me about that experience when they were older. We also love the prison program. Ella would like to help with that as soon as she's old enough.

Thinking back to how little we knew when we got our first dog and how patient and helpful Barb, Mark, Sue and so many others have been with us as we've grown. I am NOT a natural at this. Thanks for all the patience. We've learned a lot from dogs and people of all ages!

**What do you enjoy most?** Getting to know all the dogs and all the generous people helping to make a difference in the world. Hearing the GDMIs and clients share stories about what happens after we're done with the puppy raising. Being a part of a group where my kids are judged for their dedication and hard work, not their age.

There have been some tears when we had to say goodbye, but we always know these dogs will be well loved and Sue or Kris will have another sweet dog for us soon! Ella pointed out recently that we haven't had to say goodbye to a dog who's gotten old because we're always getting another young one.

**Any advice or comments for our newer volunteer raisers and sitters?** Don't worry! It was so overwhelming for me at first, but if you can meet up with an experienced raiser or attend a class, do it. Once you learn to connect with a dog and train "under," it's in you for life. Watch the Facebook recordings of OccuPaws classes. We're so lucky to have such amazing trainers and it's exciting to learn from the new research about dog training.

# Leo DeWane and His Best Friend Angus

## A bonded pair

**Where do you live and describe your neighborhood:** I live in the suburb of the Town of Waukesha WI. It is an old sub-division with mostly 3/4 acre lots, no sidewalks but close enough to some services to walk to. Most roads are quiet, but some have a fair amount of traffic. My Best Friend Angus and I walk confidently along these streets due to his good training and our trust in each other.

**Tell us about yourself:** I was working when my visual issues started. I owned a small business with 10 to 12 employees. I eventually couldn't go to job sites unless careful with my cane and assistance. Operating the company was made easier for me when Angus was provided to me. I was able to go to job sites and on sales calls with more confidence with my Angus. I continued to successfully operate my business and ultimately retired a couple of years ago. I now have a property in northern Wisconsin I frequent, and Angus still leads me well once again on roads with no sidewalks etc. My freedom of movement on my own with Angus was a remarkable change compared to the use of a cane.

**Tell us about your Guide Dog:** Angus is a 10-year-old Black English Labrador retriever and my first guide dog. He is a large male dog at almost 90 lbs., many think he is overweight, but he really is in pretty good shape, he just carries his weight well. He is older than most guide dogs and is showing his age in his desire to work but when we work together his performance is still consistent providing fine assistance and attentiveness with few errors. Over the years I have had the pleasure of also allowing him some freedom at the lake swimming and playing like any other dog. What is truly amazing is how I can let him run and play but once I call him and tell him to get dressed (put on the



guide harness) it is like he punches in on the clock and he becomes all business and ready to work. He is nearing retirement and I can only hope to be blessed with another working dog as loyal and reliable as Angus in the future.

**How has your OccuPaws guide dog changed your life?** Angus not only helped me to be free to walk and move around in stores and other establishments he also helped me with my feelings of isolation and depression. As a sighted man losing sight, I lost my confidence and I recessed into myself not wanting to do anything but with Angus I found my way out of the "darkness" and live a more positive outlook with a social life.

**What is something unusual that you have done with your guide dog?** We have traveled the country, been in ST. Thomas at a resort where he had a rare protective behavior moment with huge iguanas as we were getting on a ferry. I think the most unusual place I have taken Angus is to Disney World on a ride "It's a small world". He seemed to be enthralled with the animated characters but calmly watched them.

**How did you learn about OccuPaws and what has your experience with OccuPaws been like?** My wife found them I believe on the internet and I have had a great relationship with them. They are always available for questions and willing to assist us with our guide dogs or any other related needs. All of the placements I am aware of (including mine) went well. OccuPaws provided high quality well trained competent guide dogs and training for us users through the use of certified and experienced trainers.

**Any advice or comments for our volunteer raisers and sitters?** Keep up the good work?! Whatever they are doing to supply the trainers with well behaved, socialized and well-adjusted dogs is working.

**Do you have any advice for people seeking a guide dog?** The longer you hesitate, the longer it will take for the trainer and the guide dog to change your life. If you are considering it just do it; put in your application. It is a life changing experience of a lifetime you will not regret.

**Any other comments, concerns or success stories you would like to share?** Spouses and family members have a lot of care for you and wish you had more independence than you may currently have. The first time I walked away from the house with just Angus my wife was emotional and many of my friends and family members were very happy for me and my new independence. It felt fantastic.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY 05	JUNE 06	JULY 07	AUGUST 08
<p><b><u>Garage Sale</u></b>  <i>Cross Plains</i>            Details to follow, watch Facebook for updates! First weekend.</p>	<p><b><u>Outdoor Craft Fair</u></b>            June 6th            9-2pm            Commons Park,            Lake Mills</p>	<p><b><u>Outdoor Craft Fair</u></b>            July 11th            9-2pm            Commons Park,            Lake Mills</p>	<p><b><u>Outdoor Craft Fair</u></b>            Aug 8th            9-2pm            Commons Park,            Lake Mills</p>
<p><b><u>Outdoor Summer Market</u></b>            May 30th            10-3pm            Habermann Park, Lodi</p>	<p><b><u>Outdoor Summer Craft, Vendor &amp; Flea Market</u></b>            June 20th            10-3pm            Meyer Oak Grove Park,            Sauk City</p>	<p><b><u>Outdoor Summer Market</u></b>            July 18th            10-3pm            Habermann Park, Lodi</p>	<p><b><u>Outdoor Summer Craft, Vendor &amp; Flea Market</u></b>            Aug 22nd            10-3pm            Meyer Oak Grove Park,            Sauk City</p>