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Metro's 'Best Friend' to Retire

- Working alongside sight-impaired programmer analyst Agustin Moreno, Guide Dog Liza has put in 5 years at Metro. In dog years, we're talking 35 years of being happy at your job.

By GAYLE ANDERSON

August 19, 2004 - She's Liza with a z, and an aging but timeless beauty. She has four legs, a wet nose, an industrial-strength harness and a demure but regal manner. Liza, guide dog extraordinaire and constant companion of programmer analyst Agustin Moreno, is retiring from service on Friday.

Now 12 years old, Liza is slowing down. "She is still very good, but her responsiveness is declining and she is getting tired," says Moreno. Next week, he will interview a couple of candidates from the Guide Dog organization that originally provided Liza 11 years ago.

"When I come back to work, I'll be with a new dog," says Moreno.

Parting may be sweet sorrow, and soon Moreno will cross this very emotional bridge. "I'm afraid Liza will have anxieties if another dog begins to take care of me. She will worry about me every time I leave the house without her, even if a new dog is wearing the harness."



Agustin Moreno, above, gets a kiss from Liza, his Guide Dog for 11 years.



Liza gets around: Above, at work with Agustin Moreno...



... working the crowd at Universal City Station

A happy retirement

Yet, Liza can look forward to a happy retirement. It is likely she will return to her original trainer, Meri Foreman, who raised Liza as a puppy.

Now a Guide Dogs of America executive, Foreman has maintained a special relationship with Liza over the years, even taking care of her, on occasion, when Moreno vacations with his family.

"Of all the dogs she raised for training as a Guide Dog, Liza was her favorite. When Liza passed the Guide Dog test with flying colors, I became the fortunate one to have her in my home and my life."

The sweet-faced yellow Labrador joined Metro when her sight-impaired owner came on board as a programmer analyst in June 1999.

Liza, who proudly wears a Metro ID badge, has contributed to the success of many Metro projects: Among them, working crowd control at the openings of the Metro Red Line to North Hollywood and the Metro Gold Line, as well as frequent guest appearances at community expos where the duo offers transportation advice to sight-impaired and physically-impaired patrons.

Liza's big break

Liza's big break came when she auditioned for the Operations ADA training video and got the part.

"Liza had three scenes," says co-producer Monique Ramos. "Her job was to teach bus operators how to handle guide dogs."

In the 16-minute video, Liza played a seeing-eye dog waiting for the bus with Moreno and also rode the lift as a service animal in the company of a physically-impaired patron.

During her years at Metro, Liza has made many friends. Once she was crowned a princess, complete with a tiara and a royal jewel



... crowned princess in Risk Management by Alicia Grondin



...and, in a starring role as Guide Dog in Operations ADA training video.

around her neck, as she made the rounds. "We were going down the hall in Risk Management. Always, people love to see her. It's a special occasion."



Picture of Liza as a puppy, above, hangs in Moreno's cubicle.

Attention never strays

She is also good friends with Deputy Hero, the black Labrador Search & Rescue dog on duty with the Sheriff's Department. "Hero would like to romp on occasion, but Liza always politely declines. She never lets her attention stray from taking care of me," says Moreno.

"We'll miss her," says good friend C.J. Lewis, a senior contract administrator. "When Agustin walks by, she always wants to come to my cubicle and say hello."

Helen Cosner, a senior administrative analyst, is one of many friends stopping by the cubicle that has been Liza's working home for past five years. "I came to say good-bye," she says, "Liza has such a great disposition – always happy."