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Puppy Raisers from Guide Dogs of America line up at Metro Gold Line Del Mar Station for the train ride back to Union Station after adventurous outing to Pasadena. Metro's Agustin Moreno, second from right with guide dog Shadow, were role models for the impressionable and somewhat awe-struck canine companions and their very well-behaved trainers.



Confidence 101

- **Guide Dogs of America 'Puppies in Training' take a ride on the Metro Gold Line to a day full of adventure, lessons and a whole bunch of fun.**

By GAYLE ANDERSON

(March 11, 2008) It was the start of a beautiful day for Agustin Moreno, his faithful guide dog Shadow by his side. Moreno, a scheduling systems project leader who is legally blind, and Shadow, his guide dog assistant for nearly four years, anticipated an adventure of perfect delight March 8 as they waited in lobby of historic Union Station. They would soon be in the company of Guide Dogs of America volunteer puppy raisers and their charges out for the annual trek on the Metro Gold Line to a sit-down lunch in Pasadena.

With Moreno leading the way, some 20 guide dogs in training boarded the Metro Gold Line, their perfectly behaved trainers in tow. The group, organized by district leader Glyn Judson, hailed from Sylmar, Mar Vista, the San Fernando Valley, Rancho Palos Verdes and all points west.

"We do this for fun, absolutely," said Judson, his Golden Lab companion Harry practically nodding in agreement. "But, the real purpose is to train the dogs to ride on the train and expose them to all sorts of situations where they will need to focus on



District leader Glyn Judson and Agustin Moreno give Harry and Shadow a water break in the

their job as a Guide Dog."

Judson had arranged for the trek with Chip Hazen, Metro's ADA Compliance Administrator, who supplied day passes and confirmed safety measures with rail operations and security. Three fare inspectors, assigned to the group by the Transit Security Bureau, ushered the troop into a dedicated car of the Metro Gold Line, keeping careful watch, and held their post until the return trip from the Metro Gold Line Del Mar Station some two hours later.

Puppy Raisers are volunteers who adopt the dogs at eight weeks old and provide basic training and socialization until they reach 18 months old and graduate to formal guide dog training at Guide Dogs of America facilities. During the puppy raising phase, the volunteers take the dogs everywhere to expose them to as many situations as possible -- construction sites, heavy traffic areas, animals, children, food courts, shopping malls.

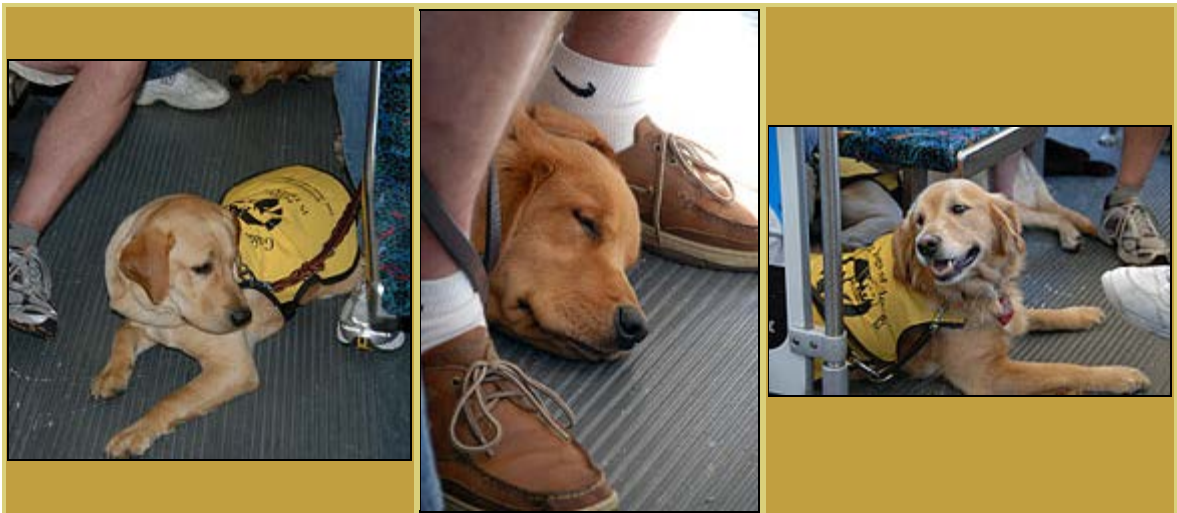
Constance Howell, a therapist who lives in Mar Vista with a 15-month old Black Labrador named Nisha, takes the dog shopping, to the movies, and even her dentist appointments. At first, Nisha took notice of the harsh whir of the drill until reassurance arrived from Constance and gained her approval. "Now, the dentist's office doesn't want to give me an appointment unless they're certain Nisha is coming along, too," she said. "They really look forward to seeing her."

Ditto for Don and Phyllis Genereux, Rancho Palos Verdes residents who have raised five dogs since they began the volunteer work in 1999. As their Golden Lab snoozed beneath the table unperturbed by the tempting aromas of French fries and club sandwiches overhead, Don reflected on the friendships and experiences with these able companions.

cool green grass of the Pasadena park. Below, Judson and Hancock Park resident Ann Benya chat over lunch while Shadow, Harry and Orion take a snooze.



Photos by Gayle Anderson



Feet, feet, feet. All I see on the Metro Gold Line are feet. Can't I even look out the window?

"Yes, it's hard to give them up when it's time for them to take the next step in their career," he said. "But, knowing they will be well prepared for a life of service in a loving environment is very rewarding for us and for the dog as well."

Moreno and Shadow couldn't agree more. "I love meeting the people who have given us so much," said Moreno. "I thank them for the effort they do, for all the dedication they put into these puppies, for the confidence they instill in the dogs so that someone like me can have the freedom to live my life."



Glyn Judson and Harry, Agustin Moreno and Shadow, and Ann Benya with Orion lead the way across the street to the park. Below, even the aroma of the Cheesecake Factory and a convenient yellow hydrant do not faze the well-trained dogs lined up outside the trendy restaurant in Old Town Pasadena.

