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Guide dogs in training assemble their caretakers for a ride on the Metro Gold Line.

## Guide Dog puppies-in-training take a lesson on the Metro Gold Line

By Laura Kloth  
Staff Writer

(March 24, 2009) In just a few years, 9-year-old Christopher Serrano, who lost his eyesight to cancer, hopes to get his very own guide dog.



Guide Dog Tyson accompanies Christopher Serrano, 9, and dad Juan, to Pasadena on the Metro Gold Line.

To prepare for this life-changing event, Christopher and his father Juan Serrano joined members of the Guide Dogs of America's (GDA) West Side Chapter aboard Metro's Gold Line on March 8.

Christopher's objective was to play with as many dogs as possible and ride a Metro rail car for the very first time, while the GDA members and trainers' planned to expose their dogs to public transportation to make them better working companions for handlers like Christopher.

The Serranos were invited to ride along on the trip organized annually by GDA Area Manager Glyn Judson in conjunction with Metro's ADA Compliance Administrator Chip Hazen with assistance from Rail Transit Operations Supervisor Ricardo

Perez. The Metro-arranged trip would take the group to Pasadena to have lunch at the Cheesecake Factory.

Yvonne Martin, a licensed puppy trainer with the GDA, said the organization has 375 working dogs, and 250 that are undergoing training by volunteers. She said the exercise on the Metro trains is helpful for the trainers, dogs and particularly the future handlers, who will depend on them.



GDA Director Glyn Judson, at right, assembles a group of handlers and some 25 Guide Dogs puppies-in-training at Union Station for a public transportation outing to Pasadena.

“This is new to us and I think it’s a wonderful thing” Serrano said noting that his son was very excited about the whole experience.

“We’re trying to get him a puppy as soon as we can, a working dog,” he said, “Christopher is very independent, but having a working dog will give him that much more.”

Young Christopher was born with retinoblastoma, a type of eye cancer that forced doctors to remove his eyes a few years ago. Fitted with prosthetic eyes, Christopher is now cancer free. School officials have approved a plan that will allow him to bring a guide dog to school when he turns 12. That news is very exciting to Christopher who loves dogs and treats his own dog, Rascal, like a little brother, his father said.

As the group prepares to board the Gold Line, the Serranos pose for pictures with the group of trainers and dogs in the Union Station courtyard as Judson greets and jokes with the trainers before boarding the train. “Everyone will get a turn. One at time,” Judson instructs eager photographers.

The group makes their way to the train, and dogs follow while passengers watch with awe and smiles.

Trainer  
Naomi  
Jost  
enjoys the  
outing  
while  
Guide Dog  
Tyson  
joins a  
friend for  
a nap.



Riding along with Christopher is Naomi Jost who is training Tyson, a 14-month-old black Labrador Retriever. Throughout the ride, Tyson and his brothers Tully and Tanner, who are being handled by other trainers, seem relaxed despite the train noise and passenger chatter.

Jost says she has trained one other dog for the GDA over the past four years, and has enjoyed it tremendously. "We do the house manners, obedience training, basic obedience training. We also do socialization which is what we're doing today socializing them, getting them use to being in places that people go that dogs usually don't go," she said.

In about 15 to 18 months, Tyson will be returned to GDA trainers to get more work-related training and become a dependable guide dog to a future handler.



Augustin Moreno and Guide Dog Shadow, at left, and TOS Ricardo Perez, right, flank event organizer Glyn Judson, GDA Area Manager.

Another rider, Agustin Moreno, who is legally blind says he depends on his trusty dog, Shadow, to ride the Metro every day. Moreno, who is heavily involved with GDA, also works as a Metro scheduling system project leader and talks like a proud father when he explains how smart and intuitive Shadow is.

"She usually looks for her seat, the ones facing each other or the two extremes. She almost asks people to get up so I can have a seat, and then she can turn around and be on that little spot. She doesn't like to be squished in-between the other seats," Moreno explains.

He points out that Shadow, like all guide dogs, are trained to stay behind the yellow line on the train platform to keep their handler





TOS Ricardo Perez, a popular rail instructor, takes a walk in the park with two of his special guests.

safe.

As he navigates the group from the train to the platform, through the a park and then toward the busy restaurant, team leader Judson, encourages trainers to focus on the task at hand, keeping their dogs in check as they file through the streets of Pasadena.

At the restaurant, the group is treated to VIP seating as restaurant-goers smile and stare at the dogs weaving around the tables before settling down

beneath the booths and chairs. Judson explains that patrons typically are happy to see the dogs, and he's only been asked once to leave from a restaurant when a patron complained about his dog.

Judson's stories continue as he recalls an email from a friend who said one guide dog saved a person's life by blocking him from crossing a busy intersection. The dog was killed by oncoming traffic, but became a hero for following his training and saving his master.

Judson shares another story where he wore a blindfold while handling a guide dog through city street. After that experience, Judson said he took the blindfold off and "bawled like a baby" because he realized just how dependent he'd been on his canine companion, and also how important guide dog training really is.

The training is the key, and while many trainers like Judson and Jost bond with their dogs as they teach them to follow directions, their focus is always to get them ready to work.

"You really want them to get to the point where you could turn them in because that's the whole goal. Of course you're sad because you've gotten attached to them, but we always know that they're going back in. And when we see them assigned to a blind person and changing their life — making them independent, there's just no greater reward than that," Jost said.

We can sleep anywhere: On the train, on the sidewalk, and even under the table at the Cheesecake Factory where everything smells delicious.

