

SOUTH EDITION

Suburban News

©Westside News Inc.

DISTRIBUTED TO CHURCHVILLE-RIGA, NORTH CHILI, SPENCERPORT-OGDEN

westsidenewsonline.com

Issue No. 22

June 1, 2008



Spencerport and other villages are great places to socialize guide dogs in training such as **Teddy**, a five-month old yellow Lab. The sidewalks, canal bridge, stairs, concerts by the canal and other social events help get the dogs accustomed to traffic movement and noises. On an outing in early May when this photo was taken, Teddy got to watch and hear the heavy machinery working near the Erie Canal and tried his paws on the steel decking of the lift bridge. Provided photo.

Teddy takes a tour of the village

by **Mark Ball**

Stu and Cindy Chait stood side-by-side beaming with pride and choking back tears at Eli's graduation. The only thing more amazing than all of the work that he had done leading up to this special day was the possibilities of his bright future going forward. It wasn't any easier with the other nine, but that is life as puppy raisers.

The Chaits became puppy raisers for the all-volunteer organization Guiding Eyes for the Blind in 1992. Cindy's interest was piqued after reading a **Suburban News** article on Spence, a guide dog named after his hometown of Spencerport. She started attending puppy classes and was quickly caught up in the program.

"Watching the dogs work with the visually impaired is amazing," said Cindy, who currently serves as area coordinator. The

program's importance really hit home for her as Cindy's Grandma Lee was blind.

"I saw how difficult life was for her," said Cindy.

The Chaits are currently working with Teddy, a five-month-old yellow Labrador, who has a great personality and shows a lot of promise. However, the road to becoming a guide dog is not an easy one. Guide dogs are placed with puppy raisers until they reach between 16 to 18 months. During that time the raisers help develop the puppy's house manners and work on socializing them. At the end of their stay with the puppy raisers, the dog is tested for noise sensitivity and confidence. Dogs that pass this test move forward to five months of training. If the dog shows a lack of confidence or resistance to training at any time during those five months they are released from the program. The next step is 28 more days of training paired with their visually impaired partner. That's the road to guide dog graduation.

"The puppy raisers and the graduates both have tears in their eyes (at graduation)," Cindy said. "We do feel bad, but it is a very special gift and you walk away knowing you did something important."

Stu said he was reluctant to become a puppy raiser because he knew that it would be tough to let a puppy they had raised go. However, after becoming more familiar with the program, his perspective changed.

"They're not ours to begin with, so we're not giving them away, we're not giving them up, we're giving them back," Stu said.

The Chaits have a solid track record of raising puppies. Their puppy protégés include: Imus, who retired from guide work after 10 years of service; Roman, a retired guide; Eastman, who underwent a career change; Gallagher, released for medical reasons and adopted by another family; Eli, an active guide dog working in Michigan; Bo, a working guide in Boston; Potter, a reg-

istered therapy dog who frequently works with students in Spencerport; Mattie, entering his final stage of training; Russ, who is headed to training in July; and Teddy, a five-month-old puppy.

Now Cindy is eager to find more raisers on the west side of the county. Currently the Chaits are the only area family.

Interested individuals can review the application process, which is available online at www.guiding-eyes-monroe.org. In addition to a need for raisers, Guiding Eyes is also looking for volunteer puppy sitters. A puppy sitter is an individual or family that watches a puppy when a raiser is out of town. Sitters can own other pets or have none, and they need not be experienced. Call Cindy Chait, 594-9808, or Donna Rice, 594-4864.

Being a sponsor to a puppy raiser or puppy raising family is another way to help. While the puppy's veterinary services are donated by area vets, other sponsors are needed to help defray the cost of feed and equipment. Interested individuals can sponsor a puppy, or give a one time donation.



Helpers at a Guiding Eyes for the Blind, Monroe Region class took photos of Teddy and other puppies with the harness they will grow into. Provided photo.