

The Seeing Eye Program

The Seeing Eye was founded in 1929 by Frank Morris. Morris heard about dogs being trained as guides for veterans of World War I. With the help of Doris Harrison Eustis, Morris completed his training in Switzerland, and then went to New York with his guide dog, *Buddy*. He sent a telegram to Eustis upon his arrival in New York with one word which said it all, SUCCESS.

The Seeing Eye uses German Shepherds, Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers and Labrador/Golden Crosses. Headquarters for the Seeing Eye is in Morristown, New Jersey where the Seeing Eye themselves do their own breeding. At the Morristown Campus, dogs are bred, trained and matched up with students who reside at the campus for a month with their new eyes.

Each litter is named in alphabetical order. Some of Paula's siblings are Paul, Peace, Pepper and Pato. Foster families receive their puppy at 7 weeks of age. The main job of the puppy raiser is to love, socialize and provide exposure to the many potential situations which may arise in their future with a graduate. At about 18 months old, the puppy returns to the Seeing Eye for formal training. "Yes" is the answer when people ask "Is it hard to give them back?" The Seeing Eye has partnered with 4-H clubs where monthly meetings are held for puppy raisers. Whether your first puppy is returning or your tenth, the answer is always "yes". It's sad when they return but fulfilling to know they will provide independence, dignity and self-confidence to a blind or visually impaired person.

Our puppy raising mission started as part of Madison's service project for the sacrament of Confirmation. Of course, Taylor was next. Well, we can't imagine our future without a Seeing Eye puppy. The girls are members of the Montgomery County 4-H club where we attend monthly meetings. It's a must! Just image about 30 to 40 puppies gathering for training and socializing. It's quite a picture. There are also outings through out the year such as bowling, sleepover, mall walks and demos. Volunteers are asked to participate in demos for senior citizen groups, nursing homes, school groups and libraries. The best part for the audience is when the crowd is able to pet the puppies. This is great socialization for the puppy.

Two messages that we would like to leave with you before we finish our little "blurb". One message is, please do not attempt to pet a service dog when the dog is working. It takes incredible concentration and discipline on the part of the blind person and the dog when they are working. The second message is that the Seeing Eye is a non-profit organization. Students are charged very little to be transported, housed and given a service dog. Each harness is hand-made in Canada. Each puppy needs medical care, food, and kennels. The organization is extremely professional and organized. You can visit the site at www.theseeingeye.org for more information about donations or puppy raising.