There is an adage which states, “All good things must come to an end.” During TD’s 30 plus years, we have certified several hundred canines and their human partners; a tribute to our success as an organization. For a variety of reasons, TD is no longer able to sustain itself in its current format. However, there is some really positive news, too.

TOP DOG has been approached by the Direct Center for Independence with the strong possibility of TD being acquired by the Direct organization in July of 2020. This acquisition will be significantly constructive for both TOP DOG and the Direct Center for Independence, whose more than 300 locations serve the disabled communities. Direct’s Tucson location is at Speedway and Alvernon.

It is my hope to join the Direct Center’s program in an advisory role, which will allow me to follow TD’s initiation into the Center’s program. But this will be dependent on the agreement reached with them. In the meantime I will remain CEO in order to aid in a smooth transition during the acquisition process. Paperwork will be sent to all current teams for a two (2) year recertification renewal in December.

It is with deep appreciation I thank all our Board members, our volunteers, students, donors, and everyone who has had a hand in forming TOP DOG over its many years. Without each of you this would not have been possible. It has been my pleasure to get to know so many of you and to participate in this program with you.

Additionally, I want to send sincere thanks to Petco for sponsoring the care and treatment of our needier student’s and veteran’s dogs. Your sponsorship has made a tremendous difference for many lives in our organization.

For the time being, the TD office can still be contacted by leaving a message at 520 323-6677 or 1-888-257-6790. The email address is: contact-us@topdogusa.org and the mailing address is 9420 E Golf Links Road Ste #108 PMB #355 Tucson, AZ 85730-1317.

Updates to this information will be provided as they occur.
Last August I got very sick and stopped eating. Mom quickly took me to see the veterinarian. The vet went over me with a fine tooth comb. After blood work and chest x-rays, he told Mom and me I had Valley Fever in my lungs. I was put on a special Valley Fever drug called Fluconazole and Prednisone. One medication was to help cure my Valley Fever and the other medication was to help me feel better and stimulate my appetite. After taking my meds for five days, I was still so sick Mom and I thought I was going to die. My breathing got so bad, it could be heard breathing (or more like snorting) the length of the house. I could hardly get up from the floor.

Off we went to see the vet again. I could not get into the car by myself and Mom needed to lift me. I had a small opening on my nose which was bleeding. As soon as the vet saw me he knew what was the matter. I am one of those dogs who has a serious reaction to Fluconazole. My nostrils were so swollen they were almost shut. The veterinarian told Mom some dogs have blood vessels expand from the drug, and unfortunately, I was one of those dogs. Within a few days I had open wounds on both sides of my muzzle, and the skin was peeling off my beautiful black nose. Mom gave me Prednisone and an antibiotic. She applied warm wet compresses to my sore nose. The wounds got so deep Mom could actually put her whole finger in them. Ugh.

It took quite a while, but slowly I started to feel like myself again and was able to move around more. My wounds finally started to heal from the inside. Nevertheless, by the end of November. I still had pink patches on my nose with no hair. Where the hair has grown in it was now white. I finished my meds the end of November and Mom took me back to see the Vet in a few days.

My veterinarian was pretty pleased with my healing and that I am eating & drinking again. Now I can jump into the car all by myself. I’m finally back to helping Mom when she drops stuff. I’m so glad Mom and I are a team. She really had my back there for quite a while. Mom and I take good care of each other. Best part is now that I feel good, I can get into bed with Mom and snuggle. I really missed snuggling while I was sick.

Thank you Mom for taking such good care of me.

As TOP DOG embarks on a new future with bright prospects for an opportunity to help more disabled individuals and their canine partners benefit from training, we offer our deepest gratitude and thanks to our Board members, our volunteers, students, donors, and everyone who through the many years, has had a hand in the success of our TOP DOG organization. Your efforts and support are duly recognized and greatly appreciated.
EDITORIAL

Cracking down on service dog fraud

Updated October 12, 2019, 3:00 a.m.

Heartwarming photos of Eleanor Rigby going into labor unexpectedly, at gate F80 in the Tampa International Airport, quickly went viral last year. Eleanor Rigby — also known as Ellie — is a golden retriever who gave birth to eight adorable puppies as she was waiting to board a flight to Philadelphia with her owner, Diane Van Atter, and another dog — Ellie’s “puppy daddy,” Golden Nugget. Media reports characterized Ellie as a service dog in training and Golden Nugget as Van Atter’s service dog.

Cute puppies at the airport — what’s not to like?

Well, a lot, according to experts who testified at a hearing on Beacon Hill last month in favor of legislation that would crack down on irresponsible pet owners who misrepresent their animals as service dogs. The Massachusetts bill mirrors the efforts of many other state legislatures, a clear indication of public frustration with the problem of fake or poorly trained service dogs abusing the protections afforded to bona fide service animals. This year, the American Kennel Club is tracking 39 bills nationwide that address fraudulent misrepresentation of pets as service dogs, according to Sheila Goffe, the group’s vice president of government relations.

The case of Eleanor Rigby and her family helps explain what lies at the root of the problem state lawmakers are trying to fix. It’s more likely the dogs were “emotional support” dogs for Van Atter, a much more nebulous term that has increasingly been confused with “service dog.”

Yet they’re not the same. We’re in a “misrepresentation of a service dog crisis,” according to Cathy Zemaitis, director of development at NEADS World Class Service Dogs, an accredited nonprofit that has trained more than 1,800 service dog teams over more than 40 years.

Real service dogs are not pets. The Americans with Disabilities Act narrowly defines service animals as dogs “that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities,” Goffe said at the hearing. “Service dogs,” she said, “are highly trained animals, able to perform their tasks unobtrusively, refrain from reacting to other dogs and people, and behave to the highest standards in public.” (They are also, most often, spayed or neutered.)

Yet a different federal law has helped create the confusion. The Air Carrier Access Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in airplanes, allows “emotional support” animals to travel in the cabin — without defining what that term means. With no legal definition, it’s opened a loophole for passengers to bring not just dogs but miniature horses and ducks. (United did turn aside an emotional-support peacock, though.) The two sets of rules have created confusion that unscrupulous owners have been happy to exploit. Anyone can go online and buy an official-looking vest for their dog (or squirrel, or alligator, or pig) and claim a right to bring the animals into public spaces.

Misrepresenting a dog as a service animal can have grave consequences. At the hearing, an Arlington resident who has a service dog and uses a motorized wheelchair told lawmakers of the risks of encountering dogs wearing “working dog” vests. If they’re not highly trained, these dogs can get stressed and interfere with the life-saving work that legitimate service dogs perform for their human.
Many pet owner’s biggest fear is losing their partner; Fido digs under a fence, or jumps over one, or just gets out some way to go exploring. That’s why microchipping your dog is so very important. However, a microchip is only good if it is registered. [https://www.foundanimals.org/microchip-registry/owners/](https://www.foundanimals.org/microchip-registry/owners/) is a FREE Microchip Registry that accepts all brands of chips. This non-profit is also a great resource for information on a variety of topics. Check it out!