

Leader Dog program provides independence to New Yorker for more than 40 years



Picture New York City – the busy, people-crowded streets, subways and skyscrapers. Imagine the sounds and smells, the bustling noise and hurried pace. Now imagine what it would be like to navigate the city if you were blind.

For nearly 50 years, Enid Bourne has done just that – thanks to the dog guide and instruction she received at Leader Dogs for the Blind in Rochester, Michigan. While receiving her first Leader Dog in 1947, Enid was one in a class of four students at Leader Dog participating in the training. Since then, Leader Dog has grown to assist nearly 13,000 people achieving the freedom of safe and independent travel. Graduating approximately 300 dog guide-student teams each year, the school serves blind individuals from all areas of the globe.

With her Leader Dog by her side, Enid has been able to traverse the streets of New York. She travels using the subway system to enjoy all of the delights the city has to offer including belonging to her neighborhood church choir, dining at the city's multitude of restaurants and attending a cultural array of concerts and

musical events. She's also achieved a fulfilling and unique 41-year career as a medical transcriptionist in the New York City Chief Medical Examiner's office.

"My mother wanted me to be independent," Bourne said. "And at the time—because of the cultural climate in this country—Leader Dogs for the Blind was the only such school that would allow me, as a black woman, to attend the program. I am so glad I did. I haven't missed a thing in my life because of the independence my Leader Dog provides."

Throughout the years, Enid has partnered with seven Leader Dogs, each one with their own personality. Bourne said the first step to acclimating the dog to the city is to take her partner to the subway.

"We simply stand and listen to the sounds," she said. "They have to get used to the rush of noise when the train comes in, and also become accustomed to all of the people in a hurry. But the Leader Dog guides make the adjustment easily – they're such calm, sweet dogs."

Even at her work as a medical transcriptionist, Bourne said her dog was always at her side.

Bourne says Leader Dogs for the Blind has come a long way since her first visit when the facility was headquartered in an old farmhouse. At her most recent

visit, she was able to stay in the newly opened Polk Residence and Training Center, one of the largest improvements to the school in more than 60 years. The new 65,000-square-foot facility allows Leader Dog to dramatically expand its current services available to the blind. In addition to providing students with private rooms for their 26 day stay at Leader Dog, the new facility houses special grooming stations for dogs, a lecture room and library, banquet center for special events, exercise room and a technology center.

"It's an amazing place," Bourne said. "But the heart of this organization hasn't changed – and what they've done for me hasn't either. My Leader Dog has let me live a full, independent life. I wouldn't change the experience for the world."

Leader Dogs for the Blind is celebrating 65 years of service to the community. Founded in 1939, the non-profit organization is supported by contributions from Lions Clubs, foundations, grants and, in large part, the generosity of the general public. The kindness of these individuals enables Leader Dog to offer the services free of charge to the blind community although the cost to the school is over \$30,000 for each graduating student-dog team. For more information about Leader Dogs for the Blind, how to apply for a Leader Dog or to support the organization, please call (888) 777-5332 or visit www.leaderdog.org.



Enid Bourne is going home to New York City, a city she has lived in independently since 1957, thanks to her Leader Dog. Aboard Spirit Airlines, her new canine partner, Lilly, was right beside her throughout the trip. Carl Crawley, Lead Customer Service agent for Spirit Airlines, assisted Enid during her most recent trip.