Minutes

GDUI Board of Directors Meeting

March 23, 2024

1. The GDUI Board of Directors convened on Saturday, March 23, 2024, at 1:10 pm eastern via Zoom.

2. Attendance:

a. Board Members Present:

Sarah Calhoun, President,,

Maria Hansen, 1st Vice President,

Maria Kristic, Treasurer,

Lynn Merrill, Secretary,

Lolly Lijewski, Director 2,

Olivia Norman, Director 3,

Vicky Kennedy, Director 4,

Kay Malmquist, Director 5,

Joyce Feinberg, Affiliates Liaison,

Ryan Hooie, Guide Dog Schools Liaison,

Andrea Giudice, Editor,

b. Board members Excused (E) or Absent (A)

Cheryl McNeill Fisher, 2nd Vice President, (E),

Penny Reeder, Immediate Past President, (E),

Cynthia Hawkins, Director 1, (E),

Liz Bottner, Director 6 , (E),

c. Invited Guests:

Cindy La Bon, Membership Committee Chair (E)

Dixie Sanderson, Membership Data Base Manager (P),

Melanie Brunson, Advocacy and Legislative Affairs Committee Chair P)

Terri Terlau, Special Concerns Committee Chair (E),

Kenneth Semien, Sr., ACB Board Liaison (E),

d. Others Present: GDUI members who were in attendance were invited to announce themselves. Three members announced their presence.

3. Approval of Agenda: President Calhoun called for any additions or changes to the previously published Agenda. President Calhoun added two items, one dealing with a request from Pawsitive Dog Training and another from Nicholas Giudice, Ph.D., regarding autonomous cars. J. Feinberg asked to add discussion of website support for affiliates. A motion was made to approve the Agenda with changes (Hansen/Kennedy). Motion passed unanimously by acclamation.

4. Announcements:

Meeting protocol: if one wishes the floor, please do not interrupt; members who wish to comment will be asked to state their name when the person speaking has finished. Those who have stated their names will be called upon in the order in which they were stated. GDUI members in attendance may make comments prior to the Board voting on an issue.

5. Approval of minutes: Minutes of the January 27, 2024, and February 3, 2024 (Special), , Board of Directors Meetings were distributed to members prior to the meeting. President Calhoun called for any changes. Hearing none, the minutes were approved as submitted.

6. Acceptance of Treasurer’s Reports: Treasurer’s Reports for January and February, 2024, were not available at the time of the meeting, however, M. Kristic provided a review of the income and expenses for that period. Written reports will be submitted for the May, 2024 meeting.

7. ACB Leadership Conference: L. Botner attended the conference on behalf of GDUI; currently she is returning from a work-related conference in California. President Calhoun will ask that a report of the Leadership Conference be prepared and posted to the Board List.

8. GDUI letter of support of BPI rally in Jacksonville, FL. The February 3, 2024 Special Board meeting was devoted to GDUI’s support of the BPI rally and the conclusion of that meeting was to publish a letter of solidarity with BPI on that matter. Subsequent to the meeting, BPI has elected to withdraw from participating in the ACB Conference and Convention altogether. A letter of solidarity from GDUI was distributed to board members prior to the meeting. M. Hansen clarified that the letter is not suggesting that GDUI withdraw from the convention, rather, it is advising individual members who might elect not to attend that the programs will be available via ZOOM. A motion to accept the letter (Merrill/Hansen) was made. Motion passed unanimously by acclamation.

9. ACB Candidates Forum: The Board was asked to consider whether or not GDUI should partner, as they have in the past with BPI and MCAC, to host a candidates forum. Rather than making a decision at this time, President Calhoun will reach out to MCAC to see if they would be interested in partnering to host a forum.

10. Appointment of Guide Dog Schools Liaison: President Calhoun introduced Ryan Hooie of Canada, whom she has appointed as GDUI Guide Dog Schools Liaison. He is very active in guide dog affairs in Canada, and we are proud and grateful that he has accepted the appointment.

11. Open Committee Chair Positions: There are two Board Committees (one does not need to be a member of the Board but must be a GDUI member) that do not have appointed chairs at this time. The GDUI Nominations Committee and the GDUI Awards Committee. Both committees work is relatively short-term; the Awards Committee solicits, selects, and presents awards during convention, while the Nominations Committee solicits nominations and coordinates candidates forums and prepares the ballot for elections in October. Please contact President Calhoun at [president@guidedogusersinc.org](mailto:president@guidedogusersinc.org) if interested. This year, all officer and 2 director positions will be open for candidates (as of this date).

12. ACB Convention Delegates and Nominations representative for GDUI: The Delegate, Alternate Delegate, and the Nominations representative for GDUI are open. After discussion, P. Reeder had volunteered to be Delegate, D. Sanderson as Alternate Delegate, and A. Giudice as Nominations representative.

13. Community Call introducing GDUI: P. Fletcher reported that a Community Call is scheduled for April 6, 2024 at 1:00 pm eastern with a focus on providing information about GDUI and offering the opportunity for questions and answers in order to reach out to prospective new members. The information for calling in will be published as soon as confirmation is received that the event has been accepted into the Community Call schedule. The ZOOM link cannot be posted on websites or social media.

14. Editor’s Report (A. Giudice): Paws for News You Can Use (Paws) is published every other month with a goal of being on the 5th, however that may vary periodically due to technical issues. Articles and events (for the events calendar) should be submitted by the 15th of the month prior to publication, however, exceptions to that deadline are given in some circumstances.

15. Extraordinary Veterinary Care Program: The task Force will be meeting again with the DC Pro Bono Office on March 29, 2024 to further discuss questions related to amending the purposes of the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws as well as the administration of the program.

16. Affiliates Liaison Report (J. Feinberg): In a recent affiliates meeting, two affiliates asked if GDUI has funds available for affiliates for website support (host server and rebuilding). While there is nothing in the GDUI Budget for 2024, a specific request for funding should be submitted to the Budget and Finance Committee for consideration. The email address is: [budget@guidedogusersinc.org](mailto:budget@guidedogusersinc.org).

17. Paws-A-Tive Choice Dog Training: A message was sent to GDUI from this organization asking that it be added to the GDUI website as a dog training school. President Calhoun reached out to them asking for more information, but has not received a response. Their website is: <https://pawsativechoice.com/>.

18. A. Giudice presented a request on behalf of Nicholas Giudice, Ph.D., concerning research on the accessibility of autonomous vehicles for blind individuals and older adults. This newest mode of transportation has huge potential for people who currently don’t drive but is also significantly limited due to use of almost exclusively inaccessible, vision-only  interfaces.

The NIDILRR project, being submitted with Dr. Raja Kushalnagar from Gallaudet University,  extends previous work he has done in this area but focuses on in-cabin access, rather than  things like finding the vehicle when there is no longer a human in the loop. A motion to sign a letter of support (Giudice/Merrill), with the letter to be reviewed by the Board prior to signing, passed by acclamation.

19. M. Hansen provided an update on the 2024 Program. A double ZOOM presentation with the Guide Dog Schools Update is scheduled on Thursday, June 27, from 11:00 to 12:15pm and 12:30 to 1:45 pm. On Saturday, June 29, at 11:00 am, a session is scheduled with (hopefully) three international schools. Programs for the hybrid programs in July are in progress. A plush dog in harness, a black lab, has been generously donated for a drawing.

20. Upcoming meetings/important dates:

May 18, 2024, 1:00pm eastern, Board Meeting

July 27, 2024, 1:00pm eastern, Board Meeting

September 28, 2024, 1:00pm eastern, Board Meeting

October 19 and 20, 2024, Annual Membership Meeting and Elections Begin

November 23, 2024, 1:00pm eastern, Board Meeting

20. Adjournment: In the absence of further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:10 pm.

Respectfully,

Lynn Merrill

GDUI Secretary

Letter for Dr. Giudice research project:

Two people with dogs

Description automatically generated**GUIDE DOG USERS, INC.**

3603 MORGAN WAY

IMPERIAL, MISSOURI 63052

Toll Free: 1-866-799-8436

[www.gdui.org](http://www.gdui.org)

March 24, 2024

RE: Letter of Support for NIDILRR RERC project on accessible autonomous transportation

Dear Dr. Giudice,

I am writing this letter, in my role as President of, Guide Dog Users, Inc. (GDUI) in strong support of the NIDILRR project with Dr. Nicholas Giudice as the UMaine lead, entitled “Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Accessible Information and Communication Technologies for Home and Transportation: Independent Living and Aging in Place (RERC AICT-HT)”.

The project deals with new technical solutions for increasing the independence of blind and low vision (BLV) people and older adults by promoting access to a new and exciting mode of transportation, that of autonomous vehicles (Avs). The inability for BLV people (many of whom are over 65 years of age) to have robust and accessible transportation, when and where they need it, is one of the most significant challenges faced by our constituents. Therefore, GDUI completely supports any new technologies and multi-sensory, non-visuocentric solutions providing safe and accessible modes of transportation, as is being proposed in this innovative project.

A fundamental tenet of Guide Dog Users, INC. is to increase the independence, security, equality of opportunity, and quality of life for all blind and low vision people. Established in 1972, GDUI has a rich history of advocating for the blind and low vision citizens in all of these great United States! We have seen many changes in the over 50 years since we began and GDUI is proud to have been a part of those changes which have brought, and continue to bring, about a higher quality of life along with greater independence for BLV citizens.

We agree with the core motivation of this proposal that Avs of the future have enormous potential as a solution to current transportation problems faced by BLV people and older adults. We also understand that to be effective, this new technology must address accessibility concerns from the onset, as is being done in the proposed project. In short, the deployment of Avs has huge potential for providing new transportation solutions and increasing independence of blind and low vision people, so as an organization committed to advancing policy and advocacy for our constituents, ensuring that this future technology is both accessible and usable is crucial! We are confident that this team has the ability, know-how, and expertise to further this mission and are happy to support them in this project.

GDUI is delighted to support the project in several ways.

1. We will give input and guidance to the team on user needs and current policies.
2. We will assist when possible to connect project team members with prospective users to participate in their usability experiments or focus groups; while always respecting and protecting the privacy of our member’s personal information.
3. We, as an invested community, will assist the team by providing feedback on the beta product as appropriate to ensure it is being designed with blind users in mind and will best support our needs.

I, along with the board and membership of GDUI, look forward to providing input to the project team and for the new transportation opportunities their forward thinking, insightful work will provide the BLV community.

Sincerely,

Sarah Calhoun, President, GDUI

\*\*\*end\*\*\*

Advocacy and Legislative Affairs Committee

The Advocacy committee did not meet in February so we do not have anything new to report for the meeting on Saturday.

Melanie Brunson, Chair

\*\*\*end\*\*\*

Affiliates Liaison Report

There will be an Affiliates meeting on Wednesday, March 20, 2024.

The summary of the January 17, 2024 meeting is delayed due to my illness, but we would like to welcome the new contributor from Pine Tree Guide Dog Users – Sadie from Maine.

Joyce Feinberg

Affiliates Liaison

\*\*\*end\*\*\*

Editor’s Report

Greetings all,

The next issue of Paws for GDUI- News You can Use will be published on Friday, 4/5/24. I sent the reminder message requesting submissions, and got one!

Remember that Paws for GDUI- News You can Use is published bimonthly, this means if you, or an organization you are a part of, has an event or something of note that occurs in the months between issues (January, March, May, July, September, and November) please send the announcement of such early enough for it to get mentioned in the issue that precedes the month of the event.

As always- please keep the articles; app and technology suggestions; names of blogs; recipes; funny, unusual, and just plain weird news tidbits coming. Together we will make “Paws” better and better!

Respectfully submitted

Andrea Giudice, editor

Paws for GDUI- News You can Use

\*\*\*end\*\*\*

Fundraising Committee

GDUI held  a successful Double Good Popcorn fundraiser beginning February 23rd and ended on the 27th, raising over $600.00 for GDUI!

A huge thank you to Penny Reeder who wrote spectacular notices not only promoting GDUI but the Academy Awards where people could enjoy their specialty popcorn  while watching the video described event!

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Calhoun

\*\*\*end\*\*\*

Membership Committee

My plan for convention is to hopefully visit the various affiliate meetings and begin setting up times for a visit to speak about GDUI and the various affiliates.  Then my plan is to pass around to the various schools information about GDUI and what is available by joining.

I  did speak with somebody recently who found GDUI through Leader Dogs when she was in training and thought that was great!

I  would like to stick in the Registration packet in large print and also in Braille an information sheet about GDUI but probably need permission from somebody!

This is my story and sticking to it!

Thanks much,

Cindy LaBon and Goodman the bestest guide dog

Membership Chair

\*\*\*end\*\*\*

Membership Database Report

March 17, 2024

Annual members:269

Life Members:118

Total membership: 387

Of that number 228 are affiliate members

Respectfully submitted,

Dixie Sanderson

Guide Dog Users Inc.

Membership Database Manager

\*\*\*end\*\*\*

\*\*\*end\*\*\*

Hello fellow board members,

Below my signature, please find an email from Sheby Regan with Pawsitive Chance Dog Training. I would like to get your thoughts on this request. We can discuss during Saturday's board meeting.

Thank you all for your time and work for GDUI!

Best,

Sarah

-----Original Message-----

From: Guide Dog Users Inc. <[webmaster@guidedogusersinc.org](mailto:webmaster@guidedogusersinc.org)>

Sent: Wednesday, March 13, 2024 2:03 PM

To: [president@GuideDogusersinc.org](mailto:president@GuideDogusersinc.org)

Subject: Guide Dog Trainer (GDMI)

Name: Sheby Regan

Email: [pawsitivechancedogtraining@gmail.com](mailto:pawsitivechancedogtraining@gmail.com)

Phone:

Message Body:

My name is Shelby Regan and I am an experienced GDMI and service dog trainer. I was a puppy raiser in college then apprenticed for a guide dog organization then worked as a GDMI for 7 years. I have since moved away from any local guide dog organizations, but now own my own business training customized service dogs for people who do not qualify to receive a dog from a service dog organization due to their unique needs.

I have also had a number of guide dog users who owner train their own guide dogs contact me asking for assistance in training or to bounce ideas off me. I have recently learned that there is a large population of people who choose to owner train their guide dogs for a variety of reasons – either they are unable to dedicate 2-4+ weeks to leave home and attend training, they are looking for (or need) a different breed than what is offered, or most frequently, they have other disabilities and need other tasks in addition to guide tasks. Some even already have seasoned service dogs and are looking to start guide dog training with their existing service dog. For the past few months, I have been working with a number of people to support them through the process of training their guide dog or their existing service dog to perform guide tasks. I would like to continue to be a resource for those who are unable to attend a guide dog organization for any reason who are looking to train their own guide dog independently. I understand that this is unconventional, but long before I offered support, there were guide dog users training their own service dogs without much guidance because it simply didn’t exist. I would like to support this community in the best way that I can and to me, that means offering whatever knowledge I can to be a resource so guide dogs and guide task training can be more accessible. I would like to be offered as a resource by your organization so those who are attempting to owner train without any help because they are unsure where to find it, can easily find me.

I appreciate your time and again, I understand this is unconventional, but I think it is an important part of creating accessibility with guide and service dogs.

Shelby Regan

\*\*\*end\*\*\*

Hello everyone,

Copied below and attached, please find the proposed GDUI statement regarding standing in solidarity with Blind Pride, International (BPI). We will be voting on the statement during the meeting.

Proposed statement:

Guide Dog Users, Inc. (GDUI)

stands in solidarity with Blind Pride, International (BPI)

, who has chosen not to attend the 2024 American Council of the Blind (ACB) conference and convention in Jacksonville, FL, because of ACB’s lack of tangible support for BPI’s concerns regarding the status of human rights protections in the state.  We urge any of our members who may feel vulnerable in a state which has adopted legislation that makes members of marginalized communities feel unwelcome or unsafe, to pay attention to travel advisories promulgated by the NAACP the Human Rights Campaign and Equality Florida, the ACLU of Florida and others, and, if you feel anxious about traveling to Florida,  to forgo in-person participation at this year’s GDUI and ACB convention events. The safety and comfort of our members is just as important to GDUI as our mission of upholding the civil rights of guide dog users and all people who are blind and low vision. Civil rights are human rights, and we share with BPI a strong commitment to civil and human rights for all people.

GDUI has been proudly affiliated with ACB since 1972, and we fully believe that the American Council of the Blind’s ongoing advocacy on behalf of people who are blind has led to significant advancements in civil rights protections and improvements in opportunities for many Americans who are blind, including those of us who rely on guide dogs for independence and safety. . We are disappointed that ACB’s board seems to have lost their way when they refused to endorse a rally that would have promoted and celebrated human rights in the city of Jacksonville.

Plans for GDUI’s summer convention continue to evolve. No matter what individual members decide about whether or not to attend our convention in-person, we want to assure everyone that virtual convention programming will be available in real time and online to all GDUI members and friends who register, and that GDUI will post contact information  for a delegate whom members can easily contact to facilitate voting for ACB candidates and resolutions during convention plenary sessions.

We welcome opportunities for collaboration with other ACB affiliates who, like GDUI, stand in solidarity with Blind Pride International, and we urge our parent organization to make a firmer commitment to promote and safeguard diversity, equity, inclusion, and access,  which are core principles for all of ACB and its committees and affiliated organizations. We applaud BPI for their courage and strength of conviction, and we are proud to join in solidarity with them.

\*\*\*end\*\*\*