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**Aetna Foundation Reaffirms Investment In Life-Changing Work of Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation**  
*Ongoing support provides more opportunities to partner blinded veterans with Fidelco's German Shepherd Guide Dogs*

**Bloomfield, Conn.** – Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation announced it was awarded a \$25,000 grant from the Aetna Foundation in support of its Share the Vision® with Veterans Program.

There are more than 160,000 blind veterans now living in the United States, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs, and that number is expected to increase. Each year, some 7,000 veterans from the Korean and Vietnam conflict eras become blind or visually impaired due to age-related diseases. And about 17 percent of younger veterans wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan suffer traumatic eye injury, according to the American Foundation for the Blind, including penetrative eye damage from IED explosions.

Fidelco's Share the Vision® with Veterans Program aims to provide blinded veterans with the gift of renewed independence and confidence through a partnership with a Fidelco Guide Dog. Fidelco provides its guide dogs at no cost to its clients, which is why the support from the Aetna Foundation is so crucial: currently the Veterans Administration does not provide assistance to veterans in their quest to obtain guide dogs.

"There is no greater sacrifice than serving in the military and defending our country," said Eliot D. Russman, Fidelco's President and Chief Executive Officer. "The Aetna Foundation's passionate support of our mission enables Fidelco to expand its efforts to serve our nation's blinded heroes with the highest quality German Shepherd Guide Dogs available anywhere in the world."

The Aetna Foundation's mission is to promote wellness, health, and access to high-quality health care for everyone, while supporting the communities they serve. This grant to Fidelco helped partner a blinded veteran, Arthur W., a retired Marine living in New England, with a Fidelco German Shepherd Guide Dog.



"We have all witnessed Fidelco Guide Dogs in action. Every day, they make a vital difference in people's lives," said Sharon Ions, Corporate Relations Director for the Aetna Foundation. "We're incredibly proud to support Fidelco as they improve the lives of our veterans and many others who enjoy the increased independence these highly-trained dogs provide."

Recently, Aetna also showed its continuing dedication to Fidelco by stepping up as the Patriot Sponsor of Fidelco's Ride for Independence, its annual motorcycle fundraising event held in July. Proceeds from the Ride help

Fidelco continue to provide industry-leading guide dog services to our nation's blinded military heroes. This year, which marked the Ride's fifth year, Arthur and his Fidelco Guide Dog, Zeke, were in attendance.

For more information about Fidelco, visit [www.fidelco.org](http://www.fidelco.org). For more information about the Aetna Foundation, [www.aetna-foundation.org](http://www.aetna-foundation.org).

### **About Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation**

The Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit based in Bloomfield, CT. Fidelco is an internationally accredited organization and an admired expert throughout the world for its highly valued German Shepherd Guide Dogs.

Each Fidelco Guide Dog takes two years, 15,000 hours and \$45,000 to breed, raise and train. They are given to clients at no cost. Fidelco provides 24/7 client support for the entire working life of its guide dogs – typically 10 years. Fidelco relies solely on the generosity and financial support of individuals, foundations, corporations and civic organizations to help Share the Vision®.

Fidelco has trained and placed more than 1,400 German Shepherd Guide Dogs throughout North America – in 41 states and five Canadian provinces. Fidelco pioneered In-Community Placement in the United States — a process that allows all guide dog users to be trained in the communities where they live and work.

Fidelco also has placed hundreds of its German Shepherd Dogs with law enforcement agencies, first responders, and search and rescue and missing child recovery organizations to help protect our fellow citizens and keep our communities safe.

For more information, please visit [www.fidelco.org](http://www.fidelco.org) or “like” us on Facebook at [facebook.com/fidelcoguidedog](https://facebook.com/fidelcoguidedog).