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Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation Receives \$106,090 Grant from U.S. Department of Defense

*Grant will go toward training two Fidelco German Shepherd Guide Dogs
to be placed with service members or veterans who are blind or visually impaired*

Bloomfield, Conn. – Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation recently announced it has been awarded a grant of more than \$100,000 from the U.S. Department of Defense to place two of its German Shepherd Guide Dogs with service members or veterans who experienced injuries while on active duty that resulted in visual impairment.

“Fidelco has been raising awareness for the past five years among our nation’s leaders about the needs of its blinded military heroes. We were honored to work with Congressman Jim McGovern (D-MA) and all of the bill's co-sponsors to create the pilot program bill, H.R. 2847, and are most appreciative of the unanimous support received from Connecticut’s federal legislators,” said Eliot Russman, Fidelco’s President and CEO.

“Our veterans risk and sacrifice so much,” said Representative John B. Larson (CT-01). “It is our moral imperative to ensure they receive all the support they need when they come home. I commend the DOD and Fidelco for their continued commitment to our wounded warriors. These guide dogs have an incredible impact on the lives of our veterans, allowing them greater independence and freedom.”

“We have a duty to honor the commitments we made to our veterans who have sacrificed so much in service to our country,” Elizabeth Esty (CT-05) said. “We ought to do all we can to ensure that our service members have access to the best available care. I applaud the DOD on its commitment to supporting our veterans. These funds will go a long way to improve the quality of life for our visually impaired veterans that receive guide dogs.”

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, including penetrative eye damage from IED explosions, according to the American Foundation for the Blind.

“I commend the Department of Defense for its commitment to serving wounded veterans, including providing guide dogs to veterans in need,” said Chris Murphy (D-CT). “The German shepherds trained by

Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation ... will help these wounded veterans recover, regain independence, and reconnect with their loved ones.”

“Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation is committed to providing a lifetime of care through a strong partnership between these canines and the men and women who have served our country. I am a proud supporter of this program,” Rep. Rosa DeLauro (CT-03) said.

“Our veterans deserve the best care and services we can provide, but too often the system has let them down,” said Rep. Jim Himes (CT-04). “These guide dogs can provide help ... for the wounded warriors who need [them].”

The Fidelco Guide Dog “Share the Vision with Service Members and Veterans” program is dedicated to creating successful partnerships between veterans and guide dogs. Fidelco oversees every stage of the training process from early development to formalized guide dog instruction. Their comprehensive application process ensures optimal placements for each veteran and guide dog partner.

“Trained guide dogs offer life-changing assistance for wounded and visually impaired veterans, allowing for independence and mobility that may otherwise have been out of reach,” said Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT). “This federal award is a small recognition of Fidelco’s longtime commitment to our nation’s veterans, and the outstanding work they do to provide guide dogs to those in need.”

“One of the most important responsibilities we have as a nation is to care for the brave men and women who have served in uniform after they return home,” said Rep. Joe Courtney (CT-02). “Fidelco Guide Dogs will support independent living for Connecticut wounded warriors, and I look forward to seeing this partnership continue in the future.”

For more information about Fidelco, visit www.fidelco.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, train, and place. 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 has also 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 or “Like” us on Facebook at facebook.com/fidelcoguidedog.

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