Danny Novielli has been a guide dog handler for 26 years.

After going through school and serving in the military, he admits to coming home and being a bit of a wild driver. One morning he borrowed a car, headed to his job as a brick layer in Tennessee, and woke up from a coma two weeks later. He had been in a head on collision with a truck and was the only one injured.

Danny was rescued with the jaws of life, hospitalized, and had a 12-hour surgery. His accident caused a stroke that left him with an unusable right hand, 33 broken bones, and no vision. He was told that he may never walk again.

"Only 13 months later I was walking with a guide dog," Danny says proudly. With no prior experience then, he now says, "That dog was a C student!"

Danny calls his third guide unbelievable. "This golden retriever was something else," he remembers. "A real mind reader. I almost didn’t have to say a word." Of course, having a gem like this creates huge paws to fill! In the next eight years there were three guide dogs that hindered his busy schedule, and it was difficult to leave work every two years to train again at a guide dog school. With the common denominator being himself, Danny lost his confidence and resigned himself to the fact that there may not be another guide dog in his future.

An exceptionally busy guy as the Vice President of Operations at Lighthouse of Broward County, Florida, Danny is always on the go. He exudes energy and talks like there is not a moment to waste. At the Lighthouse he has built up operations, arranged for local contract work and built up their workforce. The Lighthouse provides leadership, advocacy, and services to empower blind and visually impaired individuals to live independently with employment and fulfilled lives.

Danny was paralyzed by anxiety when his sixth guide dog just quit working for him. Instructors that knew him well encouraged him not to give up and to call Freedom. Our Hometown Training™ appealed to him as it allowed him to stay at home and continue working during placement.

Eric Loori, Freedom’s Executive Director, interviewed Danny in November of 2020 and took the time to find the perfect dog for his personality and schedule. Finally, in May of this year Tree arrived!

"In my last eight years, this is my absolute best placement ever!" Danny exclaims. "She is the tiniest dog, but the perfect worker, figuring everything out. This is the quickest bond I have ever formed with a guide, and I’m amazed at her understanding. We hit the ground running and have already been to Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Arkansas this summer."

Danny says Tree is a fast walker and prefers indoor work to the heat in Fort Lauderdale, but she gets them where they’re going regardless. She loves to swim during her down time and jumps in Danny’s arms to take a rest before paddling off again on her 15-foot rope.

Laughing, Danny says that Tree avoids manhole covers at all costs. She will teeter on the edge of a curb to move around them with grace and speed. She loves harassing the golden retriever she lives with, but never gives dogs a glance when she’s working. And she doesn’t like the housekeepers or their strange carts in hotel corridors!

Danny concludes, “There are lots of guide dog schools. Freedom’s Hometown Training™ creates a special niche. They train with love so the dogs work for love. And I’m so happy to have been treated so honestly. They definitely deserve to be supported, because to me, Freedom means freedom.”

We couldn’t have said it better.
A friend once said to me, “The right dog always finds you at just the right time.” As I reflect upon a lifetime of owning and raising dogs, I realize how profound a statement that is. Each of my dogs have come to me at a time when I needed that particular dog to teach me something. Tree came to us at a time when we needed her the most.

We were grieving the loss of our 14.5 year old Labrador Retriever when we decided to raise a pup for Freedom Guide Dogs. Previously we had raised two other guide dogs for another guide dog school plus 4 of our own therapy dogs who had worked in my 5th grade classroom. We recognized immediately that Tree was an exceptional dog. She was an eager and attentive learner who quickly mastered the commands of sit, stay, down, heel and come. The challenge became keeping her interested or she would make up her own games. She loved to steal my Crocs and run off with one. When I said, “Oh, oh, where’s my shoe?” she would rush back to me, sit and present me with the missing shoe as if it were a gift. Her expression said, “Here it is, Mom!” She never chewed the shoes and always brought them back; her little game.

Tree enjoyed doing anything I was doing whether it was taking a walk, shopping, practicing my guitar, digging in the garden, camping or going for a swim in the lake. She quickly learned to sit quietly in the canoe and just enjoy the ride. In the winter we took her snowshoeing before leaving for Florida where she had an entirely new habitat to learn. The big Florida birds startled her at first but, she soon learned to ignore them. The little sanderlings that scurried across the sand were far more interesting to watch.

Three months after getting Tree, we lost our other dog, a 10 year old Golden Retriever, to bone cancer. We were devastated. Tree however, provided the love and attention we needed to help heal two broken hearts. She challenged our training skills and entertained us with her playfulness. A week before Tree left us to continue her training at Freedom Guide Dogs, we got a new puppy of our own to raise. Parting with Tree was bittersweet. She came to us at our time of need for which we will be forever grateful and now she has a new mission, to be the “right dog for someone else with a greater need.” Thank you, and Godspeed, our little angel, Tree! 🖤

Article written by Pat Atkinson, Tree’s puppy raiser. Many thanks to Pat and our other puppy raiser families for their time and dedication!

Julie and Skye, Lab/Collie mix, FL
Agnes and Sonja, Lab/Collie mix, PA
Barbara and Uno, Barbet, NY
Daniel and Tree, black Labrador, FL
Ricardo and Sully, Lab/Collie mix, AZ
Susan and Opus, yellow Labrador, FL
Kathy and Q, yellow Labrador, NY
Meredith and Uzair, Barbet, NY
Laurie and Turlough, yellow Labrador, MA
Mary Jo and Gemma, yellow Labrador, GA
Stephen and Spencer, Lab/Collie mix, MA
Cheryl and Thunder, yellow Labrador, FL
Carmela and Tabitha, black Labrador, NY
Gary and Tova, black Labrador, NY
Timothy and Summer, Lab/Collie mix, FL
Kevin and Saxton, Lab/Collie mix, NY

Spring 2021 Graduates
Congratulations . . . . .

You can support Freedom Guide Dogs by shopping at Amazon!

Go to smile.amazon.com, choose Freedom Guide Dogs as your charity of choice, place your order as usual, and Amazon donates to Freedom! It’s that simple ~ and we appreciate your help! 🖤
Dave Sutch is a familiar face at Freedom, having joined our family in 2009 as an apprentice trainer. Apprenticeship required learning guide dog training skills under the watchful eye of a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor over the course of three years: observing, working with the dogs, and eventually working on placements with clients.

In 2012 Dave became a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor and has been skillfully interviewing new clients, training guide dogs, and placing trained dogs with clients in their homes.

“I love the independence of my job,” Dave commented. “I have to troubleshoot in the moment because things are different from one client and dog to the next. I also love that each breed that we use is different. Labs would be my favorite!”

Last December Dave became Freedom’s Director of Training. In addition to his regular work routine, Dave is now responsible for training our new apprentice trainer. We know with his guidance she’ll be amazing! “I now need to remember to explain why I do things, not just automatically do them,” he says.

Dave owns a home in Utica, where he lives with his Freedom breed dog, Homer. When not on the road working, he plays first base and catcher for a softball team and travels the east coast participating in tournaments.

Congratulations, Dave! With Freedom you’ve hit a home run!
We love our Freedom family! It is made up of staff, volunteers, clients, breed dog families, puppy raisers, donors and, of course, our wonderful dogs.

There are so many ways to be a part of our mission from day to day. You can raise an amazing puppy, hold a fundraiser, shop at Amazon Smile, donate items on our wish list, volunteer at our kennel, or make a personal donation.

Of course we are always thinking about the future...the next litter of pups, the next string of dogs to be trained, the next group of client graduates...and how we’ll maintain the cycle into perpetuity. Consider joining the Freedom family in our plan for the future! Include a charitable gift in your will or estate plan, secure funds from your employer’s charitable foundation, take advantage of employee matching funds programs, or donate appreciated stocks and bonds. Please contact our office at info@freedomguidedogs.org for information regarding which option is best for you.

We are so grateful for the support that we continue to receive from our amazing Freedom family. The road to independence is not one traveled alone! Your enthusiasm and generosity keeps us moving forward, fulfilling the mission to help everyone who needs our skillfully trained guide dogs to give them independence.

Dedicated people and dogs, working together for the benefit of others. It doesn’t get better than that! ♥

“Freedom . . . the smallest school with the biggest heart!”
~ Lenny McHugh
and Freedom guide dog Otter

Freedom Guide Dogs has earned a 2021 Platinum Seal of Transparency! Now everyone can view our strategy, metrics, and achievements, and learn about the people at our organization.

Check out our updated profile at https://www.guidestar.org/profile/22-3136677

A Litter Plus One!

Freedom Guide Dogs breed dog Zola and her Breeder Caretaker Kelsey share a due date and will both be first time Mommas!

If you’re interested in being a Breeder Caretaker for Freedom please visit our website at www.freedomguidedogs.org! ♥

WISHLIST

We’ve made a list, checked it twice. Our pups think these things would be nice:
- Gas/hotel/VISA cards
- Airline miles
- Hotel points or discount points
- DuraChew Nylabones, L/XL
- Milk Bone mini dog treats
- Dog boots size L
- Staples, PetSmart, Petco or Pet Supplies Plus gift cards

We have a new website!! Visit us at www.freedomguidedogs.org to meet the staff, see what’s new, take a look at the current pups in training, and find out what you can do to help. We’re always hard at work producing and placing specially trained guide dogs for the blind and visually impaired, and we’ll be waiting for you to peek in on us! ♥

Thanks, Noah!

We would like to say a special thanks to Noah & Marci Needle!

Noah donated the money he received from his bar mitzvah to Freedom Guide Dogs and provided us with 55 Kong toys and 29 vests for our puppies in training!

We’re so thankful for your generosity! ♥