

# FEATURE

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## OPINION

# My walk with Cubby: A lesson in trust

*New-found appreciation gained for adage 'Man's Best Friend,' says LeBlanc*



**STEVE LEBLANC**  
Column

Sometimes it takes a little darkness to have a light shed on something truly important.

After a recent visit to the Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides in Oakville, I can certainly attest to that.

Invited to be a study buddy for a guide dog in training leading up to the Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides (May 27), I went in with equal parts nervousness and excitement.

With the blindfold on and harness handle in hand, I prepared to place my trust in Cubby, a handsome Labrador/golden retriever who's set to graduate soon and will most likely be serving a visually-impaired master later this year.

Those first few steps were scarier than I'd anticipated, especially with a few cars whizzing by just a few feet away. It's amazing how quickly your sense of hear-

ing is heightened when you're cast into darkness.

Despite clear instructions and constant assurance from Canine Vision Canada trainers Greg Clarke (head) and Allison Ashworth, I was a little resistant early on and stumbled over one course pylon - simply because I was holding the harness handle too high and rigid, and hadn't picked up on Cubby's slight turn.

'Come on Steve, try to grasp the whole he leads you follow dynamic. It's not rocket science here.'

Poor pup was probably shaking his head thinking 'Try to pay attention, robbie. My doggie treats are on the line here.'

It wasn't long, however, before my comfort level increased and I was walking at a more relaxed pace and successfully navigating the pylons, offering my trusty



Nikki Wesley/Metroland

News editor Steve LeBlanc is led by Cubby the service dog and trainer Allison Ashworth.

guide occasional 'forward' and 'find the way' commands - plus some 'good boy' validation as he kept me on the right path.

For my part, all it took was a little leap of faith.

Another test passed on the road to that doggie diploma buddy.

Now I wouldn't suggest for a second that I have the

slightest inking of what it's like to go through life without sight. That would be stupid and downright disrespectful.

But maybe - just maybe - I got a bit of an understanding of what it's like to really trust an animal and have a new-found appreciation for the incredible service guide dogs provide.

It's hard not to get a little choked up when thinking that Cubby's not just going to be a loving companion but a bona fide lifeline to someone in need.

I've never been a dog owner myself, but I've always been a huge dog admirer. The natural instinct many breeds possess when it comes to safeguarding humans is nothing short of noble, and in some cases heroic.

That's something to think about as the Pet Valu Walk

## Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides

More than 300 communities across Canada annually take part in the Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides. Most - including in Oakville and Burlington - take place on Sunday, May 27.

### OAKVILLE

May 27 at Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides, 152 Wilson St.

Sign in at 10 a.m. Walk at 11 a.m.

### BURLINGTON

May 27 at Aldershot Lions Club, 471 Pearl St.

Sign in at 10 a.m. Walk at 11 a.m.

Money raised from the walk - \$15 million to date - goes to train guide dogs, which can take up to a year and \$30,000 to train.

For more information, visit [www.walkfordogguides.com](http://www.walkfordogguides.com).

for Dog Guides draws near.

I don't think I'll ever see a guide dog again without an instant rush of admiration.

Of all the great experiences I've had as a community journalist, this was without question the most meaningful.

Thank-you Greg and Allison, and especially Cubby. You did good, pal.

- Steve LeBlanc is a news editor with the Oakville Beaver, Burlington Post and Milton Canadian Champion.

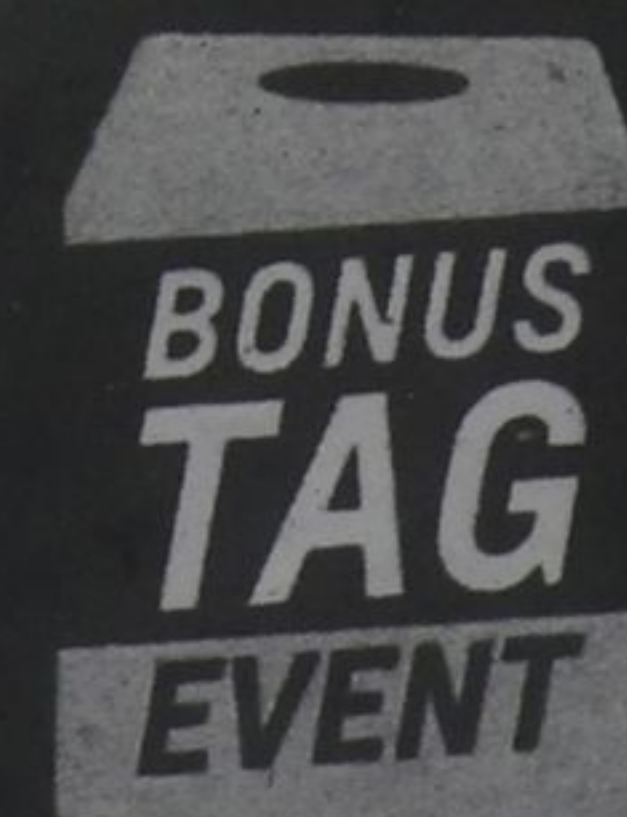
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