

# The Pathway



A KSDS Assistance Dogs, Inc. Publication  
Spring 2023 - Volume 24, Issue 1



New Arrivals ◀

Breeding Cooperative ◀

Campus Improvements ◀

## Puppy Raising Legacy

“I truly love the process...You are taken from a promise to a possibility.”



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Brett Chambers & Rink  
Harriman, TN  
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Puppy Raiser Christy Milroy

Love at First Pet



## Tennessee Man Receives Successor Guide Dog

For many of us we don't think twice when finding a chair to sit in, going to the store for groceries, or stepping outside for some fresh air. For some, however, these simple tasks are a bit more complicated. Especially when you are blind.

That is why you will see Brett Chambers usually accompanied by a four-legged companion when he's making his way around town. "When I am away from the house or my office, it's difficult to get around. With my dog, I no longer depend on family and friends to get where I want to go," said Chambers.

Although legally blind, Chambers is an automotive and small engine mechanic and a licensed auctioneer in the state of Tennessee. He has lived in Harriman, TN, for nearly 10 years along with his wife and a highly trained guide dog from KSDS Assistance Dogs, Inc. His first guide dog, a black lab named Pokewe, passed away in March of 2020 after working with Chambers for 12 years. After having that mobility aid for over a decade, it's difficult to transition back to life without one. That is why KSDS has a Successor Dog Program where past clients get moved to the top of the waiting list to receive another dog. These Successor Dogs are crucial as KSDS has a wait list of nearly four years to receive a dog.

"When I had my first dog," Chambers explained, "I came to know an independence I never had before. That is what really led me to wanting a successor dog."

Chambers received his successor dog, a yellow lab named Rink, in October 2022. "My new dog and I are alike in several ways, we both like to move fast and are eager to work," he said.

As a client of Tennessee Blind Services, Chambers was given a list of guide dog schools. After speaking with several other facilities, he decided on KSDS located in Washington, KS.

"I found KSDS to be more family oriented. My wife was allowed to be with me during the awesome experience. I would highly recommend KSDS to anyone," said Chambers.

"Having an assistance dog is a life changing experience. Being at KSDS is a great experience. The staff are all professional and friendly. The dogs are well trained and the work they do is amazing."



# New Arrivals



Kia, Aston, Merlin & Lazarus are part of the "Car Litter" born on Oct. 10th. Mom is KSDS Golden Denali & dad KSDS Black Lab Fritter.



**Donation Litter**  
KSDS Sprinkle gave birth to five girls & three boys on Dec. 12th. Names of the pups were sponsored by generous donors. As part of the breeding program, three pups are heading to other schools.



**Mick**  
This black lab pup is the result of KSDS's membership in an international breeding cooperative. He was born on Aug. 18th to NEADS Savannah, a black lab in Massachusetts. His dad Wong is a yellow lab from an assistance dog school in Croatia. KSDS has now shared dogs in four different countries: Canada, Australia, Ireland, & Croatia.



**K-State Athletics Litter**  
Yellow lab pup Jordy is the single female in this litter. Her siblings are Ohlde, Wecker, Snyder, & Bramlage. Parents are KSDS Wabash & Freedom Service Dogs Chorizo. Puppies Snyder & Ohlde are being raised by vet students at K-State, a first for KSDS & the university.



# Germany to Georgia: A Legacy of Puppy Raising

When you meet Kerstin Ramus, you will be sure to learn of her passion for puppy raising. You will also learn her name is pronounced Cass-tin.

Born and raised in Hamburg, Germany, Kerstin met her husband Paul on Waikiki Beach in 1995. Eloping in December of the same year, the newlyweds moved to California in 1996. Since Paul was an active member of the military, the couple found themselves moving numerous times before settling in Savannah, Georgia, ten years later.

It wasn't until 2013 Kerstin contacted Southeastern (SE) Guide Dogs in Florida wanting to become a puppy raiser. Her first puppy, a yellow lab named Mullins, came from Susquehanna Service Dogs in Pennsylvania, but was to be trained for the Florida guide dog school.

"I think there is something extremely special about the first puppy you raise," explained Kerstin. "You are on this journey with the dog, and you are joined with this community of people whose lives are changed by the puppy you are raising."

Before turning the now grown dog over to SE Guide Dogs, Kerstin admitted she did not have the right mindset when returning Mullins. "I experienced the typical first time Puppy Raiser feeling of loss," she said.

After fathering a litter, Mullins became a working guide dog in May of 2016. "All I knew was he had a litter with another school. That is all I knew," Kerstin explained.

Wanting to know more about the dog she raised from a puppy and the litter he fathered, Kerstin reached out to a friend who had a daughter attending school with a SE Guide Dogs staff member. The staff member shared a link of the litter announcement which took her to the KSDS website. It just so happened Mullins was bred with KSDS Lenox, a black lab.

When she saw the litter fathered by Mullins, Kerstin knew she had to raise one of the puppies. She then contacted KSDS and requested to do just that.

"I can't remember who I spoke with, but I said 'I want to raise one of those puppies' and she said they would love for me to raise one!"

Kerstin then received a yellow lab puppy named Tank.



Kerstin and Tank flying home to Savannah, GA, for the first time



Pictured is KSDS Tank (left) and his dad Mullins (right)



Tank as a puppy on the KSDS campus in 2016

She says Tank was just like his dad Mullins. “He is a solid lab. From his temperament to his diet and skills, he reminded me so much of his dad. He was such a joy to raise!” She added that his name became his agenda: “big, solid, steady, determined.”



TJ (left) at turn out & Keller (right) at turn in January 2023.

When it was time for Tank to be turned in for evaluation and placement into a training program, he underwent routine health checks. She explained, “I went home with him with the full understanding that if he became a breeder, he’d stay, and if not, I’d return him.”

Following the news that Tank was a breeder, he was officially out of the puppy raising stage, and Kerstin was ready to prepare another future hero. She received another yellow lab puppy,

Keller, who happened to be Tank’s cousin. Fast forward about another 18 months and Keller returned to KSDS.

Ready for another round of raising, Kerstin was determined to request a direct descendant of Tank. She calls them Tanklings. (On the back cover of this newsletter, you will see a story about Facility Dog Kiah, who happens to be a Tankling). As fate would have it, a Tankling litter was ready to be turned out as Keller was turned in. She received another yellow lab, now the third generation of her original puppy Mullins, and decided to sponsor the name of the new pup.

“We always used names from late loved ones, but decided to do something different,” Kerstin said. She explained that naming the puppy after a late loved one created a more emotional attachment.



Tank & TJ at Kerstin’s home in Savannah, GA

Now with her Tankling, Kerstin said they had to think of another name. “We wanted to go along the lines of his dad Tank,” she said. “So we discussed different tank names like Abraham or Sherman. In the meantime, we just started calling him Tank Junior. Then after saying TJ, we knew that was his name.”

Home in Savannah with TJ, Kerstin has either raised or spent significant time with 16 dogs who were being raised to become an assistance dog.

“Knowing I can help foster a future working dog to change a life is simply amazing,” she explained. “I know it will be hard, I know puppies can be a mess, but every dog teaches you something new.”

“Puppy raising is an incredible gift. I truly love the process of being taken from an 8-week-old puppy, to an 18-month-old dog. You’re taken from a promise to a possibility.”

Kerstin is just one member of an army of volunteers that prepare future assistance dogs. To this day, there are KSDS puppy raisers in 22 states. These vital volunteers allow KSDS to continue to change lives one dog at a time.

# Campus Improvements



**Pictured left:** Removal of the outdoor storm shelter from Banner Park. KSDS donated the shelter to the City of Washington who placed the shelter in the city park.

**Pictured right:** Trailer & new signage donated by South Central Kansas Kennel Club.



**Pictured above:** Local youth volunteers assisting in removing the landscaping stones from the south end of Banner Park. The park is currently closed due to renovations.

**Pictured right:** New flooring in the CHU sponsored by the Hopkins Foundation & installed by Dusin Enterprises Inc.



**Pictured left:** New trainer offices in West Training Center sponsored by the E.L. & Z. Irene Hopkins Foundation.



**Pictured above:** Ongoing Banner Park renovations. Future plans involve turf & assistance dog training course.

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## Upcoming Events

**April 1st Spring Graduation**

April 1st K-State Open House

**April 5th Easter Event**

April 16th K-State Dog n' Jog

**May 6th Topeka Bark for Life**

May 6th KC VisionWalk

**July 10th-12th Grad Retreat**

July 14th Pups Day

**Sept. 12th-14th Husker Harvest Days**

October 13th & 14th Pups Retreat

**October 21st Pumpkins & Pups**

## Graduate Testimony

**Facility Team #599 Erin & Kiah Topeka, KS**

"This girl. We have been 'partners' since November of 2020 and yet, she continues to amaze me! This past week we were called to be part of a crisis response team in the community. Usually Kiah enters buildings joyfully prancing, looking for any human to greet! She knew that this day was different, it was a day to be solemn and serious.

The moment we stepped into the building she became quiet and almost still. While we met with the faculty, I had her lay down by my feet. When I whispered, 'closer' she immediately rolled toward me, placing her side on my ankle. Yet, in recent practice sessions at home she has acted as if she has no idea what that command means! While in this position, and people reached down to pet her, she looked up, slowly wagged her tail and looked deep in their eyes. On normal days, Kiah pulls on her leash a bit to get closer to people! But she knew THIS day was different. When people came into the room where we were stationed to give comfort and support, she accurately sensed the different emotional states of those who wanted to play with her and those who just needed to have some peaceful snuggles.

Kiah has a few white hairs in the center of her chest. In contrast to her deep black coat, these have always caught my eye. I love to imagine God commissioning her by placing his finger on that spot and telling her, 'Go give comfort and joy to people, little one.' She has always taken her role seriously and done it well. I have a heart full of love and appreciation for several dogs that have blessed my life. But, this one, this one is divine."



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