



DATE: August 11, 2008

Did you know that dogs can help children with Autism? New campaign “Leading the Way” to better lives through service dogs!

What would you do without your dog?

For thousands of disabled people and their families across North America, that question has very special significance. Service dogs are essential partners for many of those people, offering a safer, happier, more independent life.

Tibor Hattayer knows what service dogs can do. The President of an Internet-based company, THE WAG INC. – designer of fine leather accessories for dogs – has worked with autistic children and adults for over 20 years, and has seen first-hand that service dogs make a huge difference for their owners.

Now, he wants to help make that difference available to more people.

On Sunday, August 24, Hattayer will formally launch the “Leading the Way” campaign, which will raise money to support service dogs in Canada and the United States through National Service Dogs and the Fidelco Guide Dogs Foundation respectively. For every item it sells over the Internet, THE WAG INC. will donate two dollars to each organization.

Hattayer intends to work with other businesses and partners to hit very high annual fundraising targets.

“Service dogs have a huge positive impact in the lives of people who have disabilities,” Hattayer says. “I am amazed and inspired by the way these dogs bring joy, support, friendship, and freedom to people in need. I think the organizations that train service dogs deserve as much help as we can give them. That’s what this campaign is all about.”

Founded in Cambridge, Ontario in 1996, National Service Dogs is Canada’s first organization to train dogs specifically to assist families of children with autism, to keep them safe from running into traffic or other dangerous areas. The dogs allow children and their families more freedom to visit and enjoy public places.

NSD was the second Canadian service dog training centre to achieve voting membership with Assistance Dogs International. In 2004, the organization helped develop the first

Autism Service Dog Program in Europe through Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind. Since then, service dog providers from as far away as the United States and Europe have participated in NSD's Train the Trainer Program, supporting thousands of families worldwide.

By 2009, NSD will service more than 30 new families annually with certified autism service dogs.

Since 1960, Connecticut-based Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation has trained German Shepherds as guide dogs for blind people throughout North America. Today, the organization is an accredited member of the International Guide Dog Federation and is recognized as a leader in the industry. Fidelco pioneered the "In-community Placement" process in the United States, which sends instructor-trainers to each client's home and place of employment to work with families and develop the dog-client relationship.

"THE WAG INC. celebrates the human-animal bond," Hattayer says. "I can think of no better illustration of that bond in action than service dogs. 'Leading the Way' is an opportunity to provide important resources that will ultimately train more dogs to serve more people. I intend for other businesses to get on board and find ways to support the cause."

To learn more about NSD and Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation, visit www.nsd.on.ca and www.fidelco.org.

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