Change of Seasons: Summer Heat & Upcoming Events
The new summer heat can be dangerous for people and dogs! Unlike humans, dogs don't sweat through their skin so they release heat through their paw pads and nose. To avoid heat stroke, try these tips!

**Walking:** Walk pups at the cooler times of the day, this is usually right away in the morning; the ground hasn't gathered heat all day. If the pavement is too hot for your hand, it's too hot for their paws!

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Representing OccuPaws in the Milwaukee Area

Your name and where you live: Cindy and Dave Triscari. We live in Waukesha, about 20 minutes west of Downtown Milwaukee.

Tell us about yourself: We have two pet dogs, a Pembroke Welsh Corgi and a Blue Heeler/Pointer mix. Dave works for Advocate Aurora in IT Research and Cindy works at Northwestern Mutual in IT. One of Cindy’s main hobbies is competing with her horse in jumping events throughout the country. Dave is an avid weightlifter, craft beer fan, and is Cindy’s biggest fan at her horsing events.

How long have you been involved with OccuPaws? Since 2018, so going on 3 years.

Are you a raiser, sitter or both? We are raisers and occasionally sit for fellow Milwaukee raisers. When we do sit, we have a full house with four dogs total. Dave is the coordinator the MKE raisers, planning classes and distributing supplies.

How many dogs have you had? We are currently on our seventh dog to raise: Gonzo, Felix, Java, Nimble, Lava, Stryker, Johnny B (few weeks). Of those Felix, Nimble, and Java have graduated and become working guide dogs. Mostly we raise the dogs over the age of one. This past winter since we were both working from home, we decided to raise an eight-week-old puppy, Aspen. For sitting we have had over a dozen.
Any favorite stories?
It’s hard to pin down a favorite story, but most of them revolve around people not even noticing we have a guide dog at their restaurant, store, etc. One funny moment was when we took Felix to the horse barn. Felix let out one little woof - the only real distraction he showed any legit interest in. After the one woof, he was back to himself. That's when we knew he was a special dude.

How did you learn about OccuPaws and why did you decide to get involved?
On a flight home from Florida Cindy saw the Pick of the Litter Documentary and loved hearing about this great volunteer opportunity – puppy raising! We searched for guide dog organizations near us to get involved with and found OccuPaws. We were one of the first raisers in the Milwaukee area and have since grown to having 6-8 dogs out here.

What do you enjoy most?
Watching dogs that have been so heavily invested in make such a dramatic impact on someone’s life. Seeing Felix or Java’s picture with the client and knowing how much of a difference we made for them, and the success that the dog will be.

Any advice or comments for our newer volunteer raisers and sitters?
Ask questions of any of the experienced raisers – no matter how silly you think the question is. We have all been there before with these dogs and are more than happy to help. Don’t be afraid to “do the wrong thing” – one error will rarely make an impact overall on a dog. Dave learned more from Felix than he ever imparted to the dog.
Fallon Zimmerman Introduces Her "medical device" - Her Guide Dog

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YF: Tell us a little about your background:
Fallon: I grew up on my dad’s farm, ZZ Ranch, between Cobb and Highland Wisconsin. I now live in Platteville Wisconsin, with my cat Yahtzee and my Guide Dog Bonus. While finishing up my education at University of Wisconsin Platteville, I spend my days balancing work, and self-care. I spend my days empowering myself at Snap Fitness, embracing nature and spirituality, loving my animals, making pottery, photography, singing, and making music with friends. My main form of transportation are my own two feet plus four paws. Walking safely is essential to my success in accomplishing daily life tasks outside of my home. I was taught Orientation and Mobility (O&M) skills from elementary through high school. These skills allow me to identify, with ear training, when a vehicle is near as well as how to tell which direction the vehicle is likely traveling based on the sound of acceleration. I was taught how to use a white cane, and how to properly cross different types of intersections, specifically Platteville’s, as it was the closest big town near me growing up with my high school being in the middle of corn fields. I have the skill to read Braille as well, although, it’s been many years since I’ve practiced. I was born with a visual impairment called Achromatopsia. I was born without the cones in my eyes, which results in complete colorblindness, extreme sensitivity to bright light (Photophobia,) which is both painful and sometimes completely blinding. I am legally blind. One thing people often misinterpret is what it can mean to be legally blind. According to WebMD, “If you’re completely blind, you can’t see any light or form. Of the people with eye disorders, only about 15% can see nothing at all. If you’re legally blind, you can still see - just not that clearly. Normal vision is 20/20.

"I realized freedom and independence were possible for me."

FALLON ZIMMERMAN

Photo taken by Lisa Banfield
That means you can clearly see an object 20 feet away. If you’re legally blind, your vision is 20/200 or less in one eye. That means if an object is 200 feet away, you have to stand 20 feet from it in order to see it clearly. But a person with normal vision can stand 200 feet away and see that object perfectly.” Personally, I can not see much from 20 feet away even. I hold things very close to my face to see or read. My vision with corrections is 20/200. Without corrections, it is between 20/350 and 20/375. I have special red-tinted contacts and when I wear those, people see me as a sighted person. The red covers my pupil acting as prescription sunglasses in the contact form. I have many sunglasses for different times of the day and different light settings. I am always legally blind, the extreme light sensitivity is just a matter of how blind I am and that can change just like that from walking outdoors to indoors, or day and night. Due to my extreme light sensitivity, I do not get to wear my prescription most of the time, unless it is in a very dark setting. Otherwise, I need to wear dark sunglasses (welding glasses) to be able to see anything at all, to block out the light. This idea changes what people see of me, which has been confusing for people my whole life. I have an invisible disability for the most part. I feel I have adapted well to my surroundings, having grown up in the area I live, with a can-do attitude.

YF: How did you come to own your service dog, Bonus?
Fallon: I was a greeter at the Summer Lands’ End Warehouse Sale in Dodgeville, Wisconsin, when a Guide Dog in training decided to roam free through the doorway I was standing at. After short interaction, introductions, and small-town connections, I was given information about OccuPaws Guide Dog Association, a non-profit organization in Madison, Wisconsin. I then applied by submitting my documentation of my blindness. After interviews, and waiting for a good match, I met my Guide Dog Bonus, while I was attending Edgewood College in Madison, Wisconsin. We had two weeks of intense training together, 8 hours every day. We passed, above average in everything we were trained to do together to ensure our safety. We graduated as an official Guide Dog Team on September 11th, 2016. After about a year of success and check-ins with OccuPaws Guide Dog Mobility Instructors (GDMI’s,) I gained full ownership of my Guide Dog.

YF: Tell us about his/her name.
Fallon: Bonus is my Guide Dog’s official working name. Each litter of puppies is given a letter. Bonus was in the B batch. I believe there was a deal with the breeder, buy one get one, and OccuPaws gained Bonus, as a bonus. So, he was a Bonus to the program, and to my life.
YF: What’s been your biggest aha moment since you’ve become paired with Bonus?
Fallon: I realized that freedom and independence were possible for me. I depended on my mom my whole life, which I am so grateful, for everything she has done and continues to do for me. I remember bawling my eyes out after walking through a parking lot with Bonus, because I created trust and let go of fear, fear of not being able to see and getting hurt because of it. Naturally came independence, and I started to grow into all that I now know I am capable of. To this day, I am more relaxed because of the safety and awareness my Guide Dog provides. I learned what it truly means to be fearless, physically, with his support.

YF: What are some of the ways in which Bonus has changed your daily routines?
Fallon: Bonus naturally keeps me more accountable with my daily routines. I feel comfortable going to the store humanly alone (with Bonus,) and shopping. He reminds me that slowing down is okay. He eases my anxiety when I cannot read something or am not sure where something is. I used to have panic/anxiety attacks simply because I felt the weight of people around me, and I felt I had no time to accomplish shopping the way they do, which just does not work for me. I do things differently when it comes to shopping because I have to. With Bonus, people are aware of that, at least to the point of needing a service animal for something. Bonus also joins me for my workouts at Snap Fitness, helping me navigate around machines and weights.

YF: What’s the one thing you wish everyone knew about you and Bonus?
Fallon: Bonus is his working name. He has many nicknames that I prefer people to use other than his working name. This is because, if people say his working name around him, it is more likely he will react in the way of “What do I need to do for you?” When we are working, I say his working name, and then the command. People can call him Mushy, Mush, or other famous ones given to him such as Baby B, Mushster, Marshmallow, etc. Pretty much whatever you want to call him other than his working name is fine. Simply put, when Bonus has his harness on, he is in work mode. Please ignore him while he is doing his job. A friend once said, “It’s like if I were to come to your job and jump on your desk distracting you from it…” when talking about distractions. Although for me, it is a matter of safety. It is always best to ask or acknowledge me first, if you have any questions regarding Bonus. For drivers! Please watch for us. Please give us the extra time to cross intersections. Everyone seems to be in such a hurry, but if you slow down, it could help so many things, with driving, pedestrian safety, and in life. I am a friendly person with a kind heart, and I believe that learning and growing is an essential part of life. I do my best, to do my part. Please help me, by doing yours. Thank you!
I joined OccuPaws 11-9-19 with no previous training of how to train dogs. Looking back at them days, I can laugh now because I’ve come a long way in this program. When I first started my training, I had no clue as to what to do. So, what OccuPaws instructed was what I thought was simple – just walk the dogs. Boy was I in for a surprise there. Imagine walking your dog in a heel position, now put your right hand straight up in the air with the leash in your hand. Picture how that would look while walking your dog. LOL. Pretty funny, huh? I know. That fear of walking that dog was the beginning of my success with OccuPaws.

One of the first things I did was read a book called “Puppy Primer”. That book teaches you everything you need to know about shaping a dog’s behavior. While in class I paid attention to what was said and put myself in the trainer’s shoes to learn what was being taught. This experience has changed me so much as a person. I’ve grown in so many ways and the most important lesson I’ve learned overall is the responsibility of a dog in my care. I now carry that responsibility and it has transitioned over to other meaningful things in my life such as being a responsible grandparent upon release, a responsible brother, son, father, cousin, and friend.

This program has also taught me patience. Patience is something that I can apply to my daily life. It helps me think more clearly about all situations. For example, a dog may be doing an unwanted behavior. My patience has taught me to think, evaluate and find a resolution for something unwanted. Not only will it set me up to succeed, but also other parties, rather it be a dog or just people. All this taught me to be better, live better and love better.

I would like to thank OccuPaws staff and other staff and New Lisbon for allowing me to be part of this program and giving back to the community. With that being said, I just want to say a dog training program in Wisconsin has had 68 inmates released who were dog trainers and none of them returned to prison. I believe that is because they all develop skills that helped them like it helped me. Thank you.
Swimming: A great way to exercise your pups and alternative to walking. Watch for local ordinances on where it is safe for your pup to swim, watch for currents/tides, wash them down after swimming, etc.

Other Tips: ALWAYS keep water available! Avoid direct sun, have shade available, wear booties if you have to travel on hot surfaces and limit time with these on, and hose down or pour water down your pups back.

Remember, dogs are subject to sunburn just like humans! Usually light colored dogs or shorter hair dogs are susceptible. Exposed skin like noses, ears and sparsely haired areas tend to be the most frequent.

Vendor Fairs - All Summer Long!
- In Sauk, Lake Mills & Lodi
- See FaceBook page for event details

Mounds Petfood Meet & Greet
- 2nd Saturday of the month 10-2pm
- Mounds Middleton

Fromm PetFest [free admission]
- Sept 25, 2021 from 10am-6pm
- Henry Maier Park, Milwaukee

Puptoberfest - 5th Annual [free admission]
- Sept 26, 2021 12pm-5pm
- At Wisconsin Brewing Company