

Bancroft Lions Club's Pet Valu Dog Guides Walk coming May 28



By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides is an accredited not for profit that relies on its largest fundraising event the Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides, by providing Canadians with disabilities dog guides at no cost, to empower them and provide support. The Bancroft walk will take place on May 28 at 1 p.m. Laverne Stapley, Bancroft Lions Club member and organizer of the walk, and Maria Galindo, communications manager with the Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides, comment on this amazing upcoming initiative.

The Pet Valu Dog Guides Walk is fast approaching. On May 28 at 1 p.m., starting off at Santa's Village House (between the post office and the municipal building on Bridge Street), attendees will embark on their walk to raise funds to train dog guides for Canadians living with disabilities. The goal for Bancroft's walk this year is \$3,000. Stapley says that the first walk he organized was back in 2005, and that this year's walk will be the same as last year's route; starting at the Santa House at Riverside Park, across the bridge east to Hastings Street and then over to Brewers' Retail and then back to Riverside Park. Along the way, they'll stop at Pet Valu to take some photos, as they're a major sponsor of the event.

Stapley says that the fundraising is coming along.

?You never really know until the day of the walk how much you're going to raise. I've raised between \$500 and \$600 and I know a lady who has raised over \$1,000, so it's coming and you don't know how many walkers you're going to get until the day of the walk,? he says.

The community reaction to the walk every year is positive, according to Stapley.

?They see me and Janice around town with the dogs [they've fostered since 2003] and then they associate that with the walks. And you don't even have to have a dog to walk. You can just show up and walk,? he says.

The Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides supports local communities like Bancroft with their Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides in the planning and execution of the walks. Galindo says that when organizers decide to host a walk, they are given one-on-one support from the fundraising team.

?Additionally, Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides creates promotional materials, provides liability insurance, and any other assistance they require,? she says.

Galindo explains that with one in five Canadians living with a disability, the dog guides have been on high demand for many years.

?For people living with disabilities, dog guides can provide safety and independence that they have never felt before. The impact dog guides have on the people they're matched with is immeasurable. Each dog guide team costs \$35,000, yet they are provided at no cost. To continue to empower people through dog guides, we rely on the upcoming Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides, our largest and vital fundraising event. Thanks to our national sponsor Pet Valu, 100 per cent of the proceeds go directly back to dog guide programs,? she says.

These programs are; canine vision, hearing, service, seizure response, autism assistance, diabetic alert, and facility support. Each walk is organized by local volunteers, in the spring and fall, with support from the Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides. To date the walks have raised over \$21 million. Galindo says that donations to this event can help purchase a vaccine to keep a puppy healthy, an extra fire alarm to train one more hearing dog guide, a flight for a client that is on their way to Oakville to meet their four-legged partner and much more.

To register or donate for the Bancroft walk (or any walk across Canada), and make an impact to this great initiative, go to www.walkfordogguides.com. There is no registration fee and all funds collected go to the cause. For anyone where a walk is not taking place near where they live, they can join the National Virtual Team upon registration.

According to Galindo, over 150 communities and over 2,000 people across Canada come together to raise money for the Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides each year.

?Non-COVID-19 years typically raise between \$1.1 to \$1.2 million but during those COVID-19 years, we were not able to host in-person events and that really impacted our fundraising. This year, we hope to raise \$1.4 million that will go directly back to helping train more dog guides for Canadians with a medical or physical disability. We hope to increase the number of participants from previous years (over 2,000) to be able to reach our goal of \$1.4 million,? she says. ?But in order to do that, we need folks to come out, enjoy a fun day with community members and support this great cause!?