



Appeal Has Raised £30,000 In Memory Of Guide Dog

A Fundraising appeal set up in memory of a guide dog has raised £30,000 which will now be used to train six puppies. Swindon Guide Dogs chairman Alan Fletcher, 66, launched 4Joy after his eight-year-old black Labrador, which guided him, died last May following a short illness. Alan, who lives in Stratton, aimed to raise £20,000 for charity Guide Dogs with £5,000 needed to train and look after a prospective guide dog puppy for a year. A series of events held by schools, community groups and businesses has helped Alan emphatically surpass his target and the guide dogs are now being trained, with one puppy named Joy after Alan's much-loved former guide. "We originally thought reaching the £20,000 mark might be a struggle but I've been completely overwhelmed by the response and it shows how much Joy touched people's hearts as well as helping me," Alan said. "I want to say a big thank you to everyone who has donated towards the appeal." Joy regularly appeared at fundraising events for Swindon Guide Dogs during the seven years she was with Alan and was well-known in Swindon after making visits to schools and scout troops. Alan, a former BMW engineering boss, began losing his sight 16 years ago and was registered blind in 2005. He developed an unrelated cancer behind his right eye in 2009 and his only remaining vision is the odd faint flicker in his left eye. Following Joy's death, he was without a guide dog for five months and now has a new dog called Nutmeg. "If Joy had been retiring, Guide Dogs would have looked to line up a replacement but given the sad circumstances of Joy's death that wasn't the case," Alan said. "Joy changed my life and it went backwards after her death. Nutmeg is great but I couldn't compare the two." Alan, who was awarded a Pride of Swindon award last March to recognise his community work, will continue to fundraise for the puppy named Joy and is aiming to raise the £5,000 needed to complete the second year of her training. Barbara Paul, who lives in Stratton and is Joy's volunteer walker during her training, said: "She's such a lovely bundle of joy and is learning very quickly. Joy is the second guide dog that I've helped train and I really enjoy it." Across the region the charity provides 230 guide dogs and has a waiting list of 50 people. Victoria Noyce-Guthrie, Guide Dogs' community fundraiser, said: "The achievement of Alan is truly remarkable, it shows how committed he is and how much love the community had for Joy. "This will make such a huge difference to six people's lives."

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