

Guide Dogs Inspire Paula Abdul to Join Campaign

"American Idol" judge to help Natural Balance, Petco raise money for training groups.

By Soraya Gutierrez

Posted: March 28, 2009, 5 a.m. EDT

Paula Abdul was inspired by the bond that guide dogs share with their owners. Paula Abdul knows all about the bond people share with their dogs – the “American Idol” judge cares for four Chihuahuas of her own – but the connection between guide dog and owner, she says, can be the person’s livelihood.

Abdul recently signed up to help Dick Van Patten’s Natural Balance, Petco, and independent pet stores raise awareness and money for guide dog organizations across the country. “I’m thrilled to be a big part of it,” she said in an interview with DogChannel.com.

Her role involves getting the word out to the public about the time and effort that goes into training a potential guide dog puppy. The process starts with a puppy spending 18 to 20 months with a trainer, and then the dog goes to formal guide dog training school, which consists of actual guide dog work with a harness.

After about six months of school, the dog gets matched with a blind person. For 28 days, more training takes place at the guide dog facility so the person can learn how to handle their dog.

“I have always been amazed at how it transforms people’s lives,” Abdul said, adding that she’s also fascinated by the people who take on the role of foster parent to these future guide dogs.

Paula Abdul with Dick Van Patten They’re aware of the fact that after becoming invested in raising the puppy, eventually the dog must be turned over to the guide dog academy.

Learning about the amount of time and money it takes to train these dogs, Abdul said, inspired her to join the nonprofit side of raising awareness so that more guide dogs are made available.

Coming up during the month of May – declared as National Guide Dog Month by Natural Balance – Abdul plans to do a variety of promotions related to the guide dog initiative. At the same time, she said she may also be involved in press events for the closing of the latest season of “American Idol” in May.

While not able to confirm any plans about promoting National Guide Dog Month on the show, Abdul said she’d be happy to be able to use her success in the entertainment business to cast the spotlight on the importance of guide dogs.

Soraya Gutierrez is associate news editor for DogChannel.com