

# TRAVELS WITH TYRUS

Adventurous woman explores national parks with her guide dog, Tyrus, by her side.

**J**ust before her 34th birthday, Jackie Schiemann got what she considers her best birthday gift ever: a guide dog named Tyrus.

The Ohio resident traveled to the Florida campus of the nonprofit guide dog school Dogs Inc to partner with the yellow Lab – and felt an instant connection.

“Match Day was June 12, 2023, and it was the happiest day of my life,” she says.

That happy day followed many challenging ones. Schiemann is legally blind due to a rare genetic condition called achromatopsia. “I have no color, no depth,” she explains. “I am extremely light sensitive. I fought using the cane because I didn’t want to stand out, and there’s just a stigma of having a cane.”

She did use a white cane during college and some outings but sustained injuries from falling “many” times, including breaking a foot on an uneven surface when walking in 2019. Soon after, she began to seriously consider partnering with a guide dog.

“I was sick of falling,” Schiemann says. “I was sick of missing the world around me staring at my feet and sick of moving so slowly that people were just constantly going around me because I couldn’t tell if there was a step in front of me.”

As luck would have it, Tyrus proved to be the perfect match for her. In fact, his birthday is 7/7/21, so she calls him her “lucky dog.”

Tyrus loves visiting new places and trying new things, which soon helped open doors of possibility for Schiemann. She worked diligently to communicate with him to navigate busy streets – and he saved her life within a month of partnering.

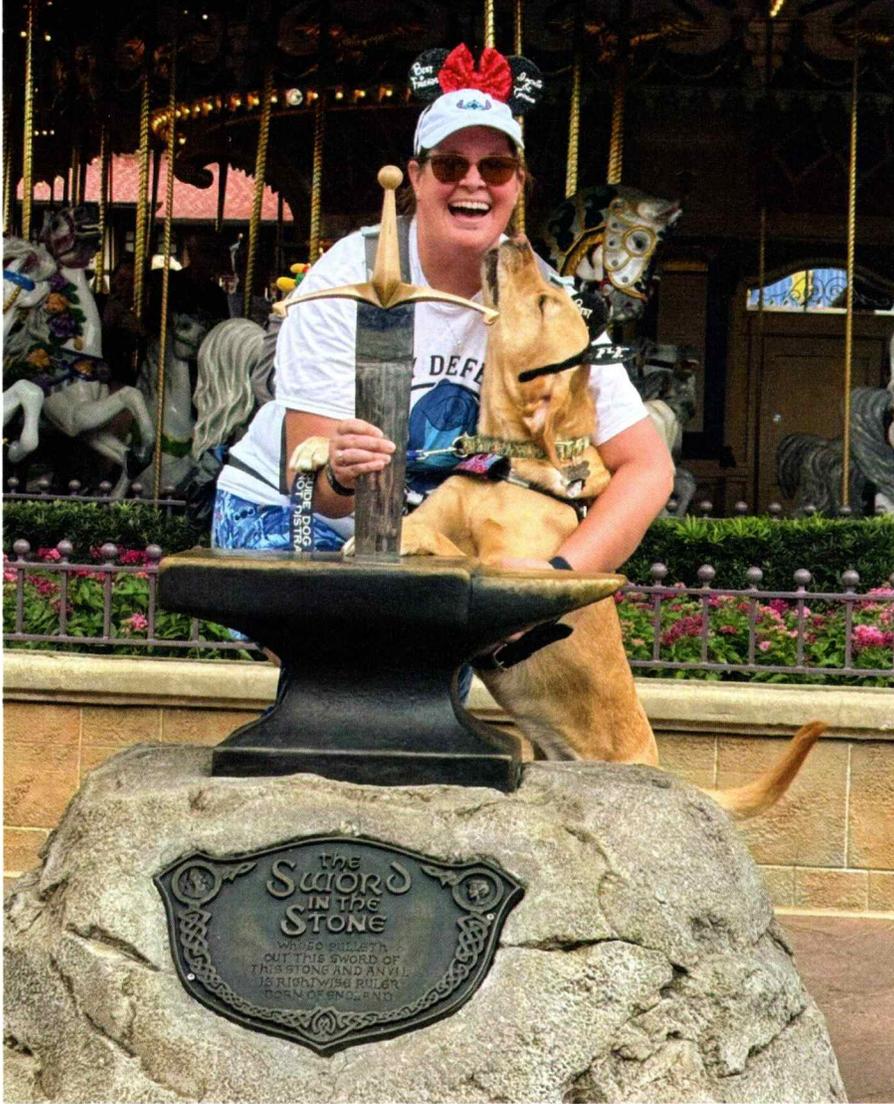
The team was walking home from the grocery store and had to cross a five-lane road. At the intersection, Schiemann said, “Tyrus – forward.” But the Lab didn’t move. When she urged him forward a second time, he took two steps and stopped in his tracks – as a car came zooming around the corner.

“If Tyrus hadn’t have stopped, I would have gotten hit by that car,” she recalls. “That person floored it. I was in shock. When we got to the other side, I literally bent down and started hugging him and crying and saying, ‘Thank you.’ They say you have an ‘a-ha’ moment with a guide dog that makes you trust the dog, and that was a huge a-ha moment.”

The two continued to bond quickly. At home, the “lovable goofball” delights in toys like his blue bunny, playing tug, and giving Schiemann kisses. The food-motivated Lab loves dinner so much that she can no longer say the word in his presence, instead using the euphemism “The D Word.”



**Jackie and Tyrus**  
PHOTO COURTESY OF DOGS INC



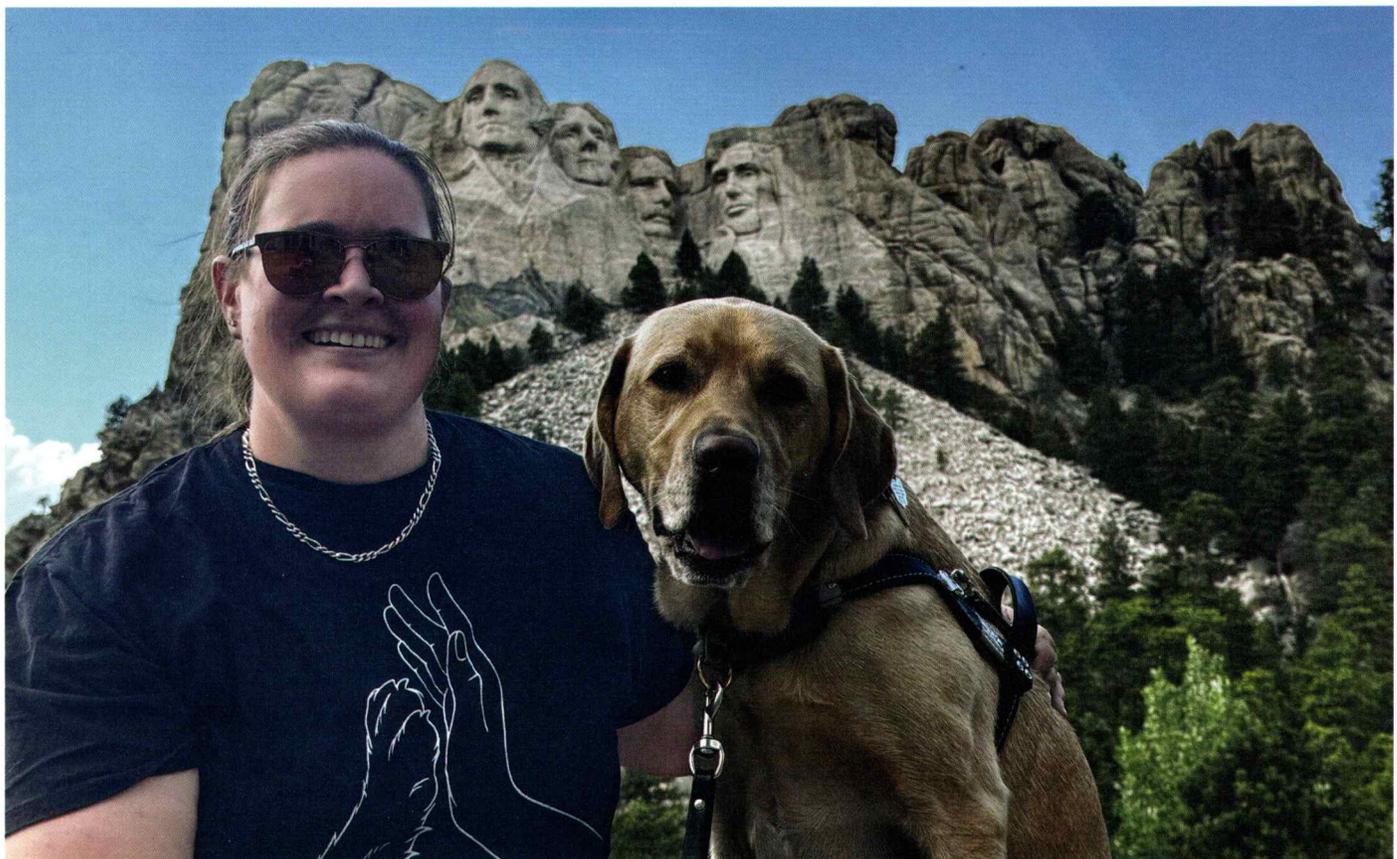
"Tyrus is the biggest sweetheart in the entire world," says Jackie Schiemann.

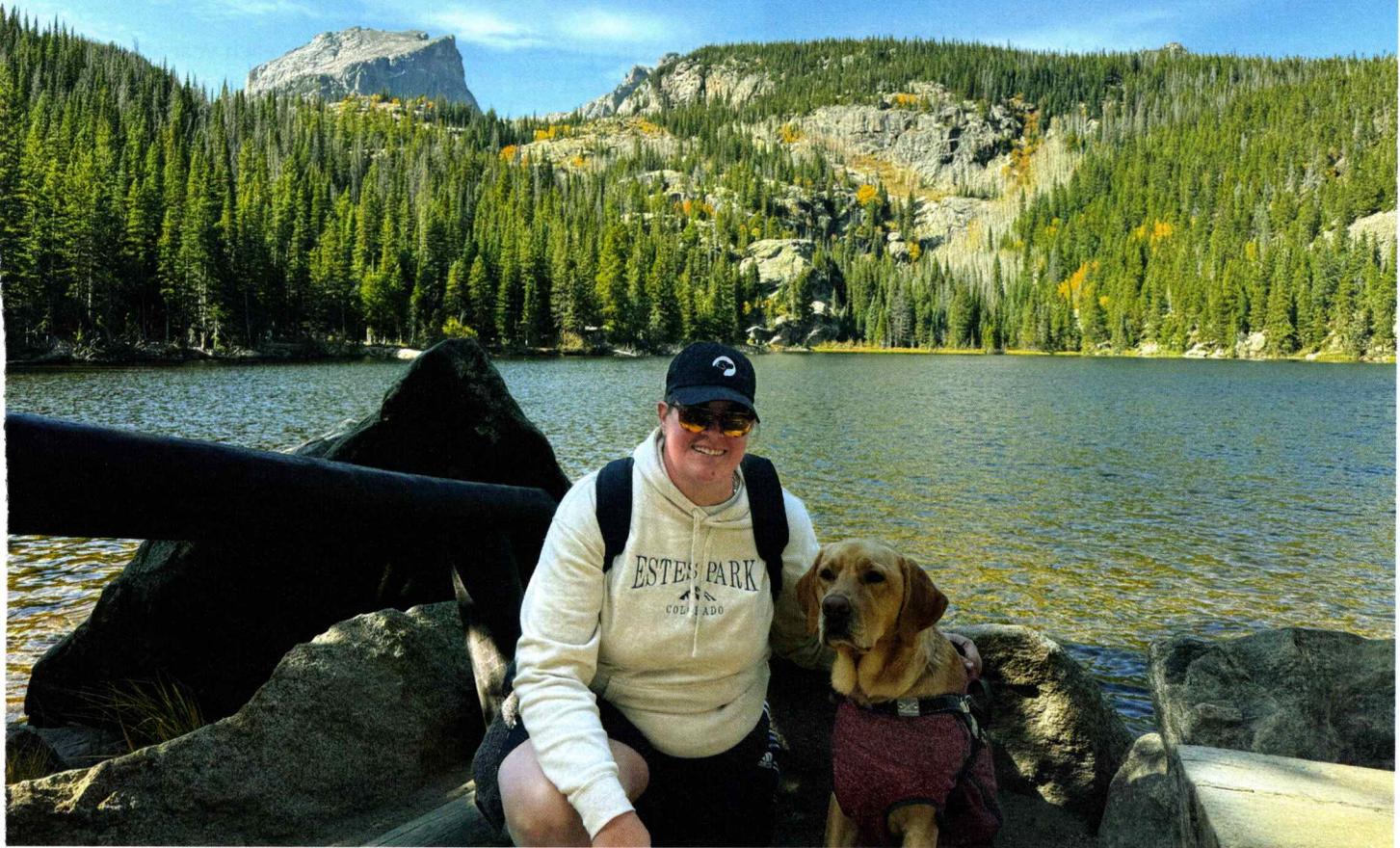
Tyrus also loves the game "Find Grandma," when he can search in public places for Schiemann's mom. His curiosity and "up for anything" attitude mirrors Schiemann's own, and they've become travel buddies.

"My parents will attest to this: I am a hundred percent a different person," she says. "I have so much confidence that I will just leave my house and go. When we went to New York City recently, we walked twenty-two miles in three days."

Schiemann, who works as an accountant and in rental property management, has taken Tyrus with her 10 times to one of her favorite places: Disney World. But she's also stepped outside her comfort zone with a new goal to visit as many national parks as possible.

So far, they've visited Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Virgin Islands National Park, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, Yellowstone National Park, and Grand Teton National Park, as well as Mount Rushmore and Devil's Tower National Monument.





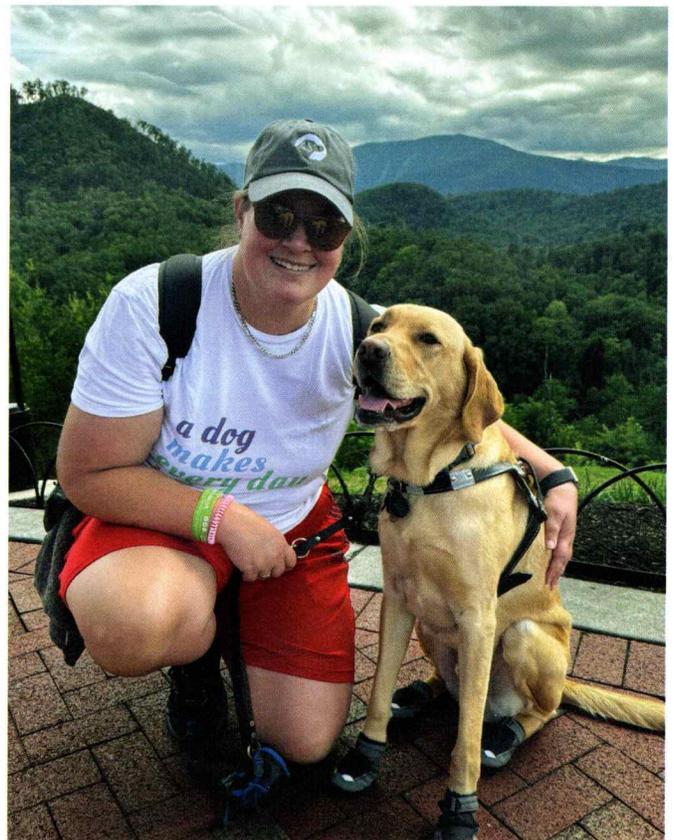
She fondly remembers the way Tyrus overcame initial trepidation about whitewater rafting on the Snake River in Wyoming, moving from spread eagle on the floor of the boat to confidently gazing over the side at the scenery around them.

She's incredibly grateful to have found the freedom and independence to travel solo for the first time – with only her guide dog – thanks to Tyrus.

"One of my goals with him is to do as many adventures as we possibly can," Schiemann says.

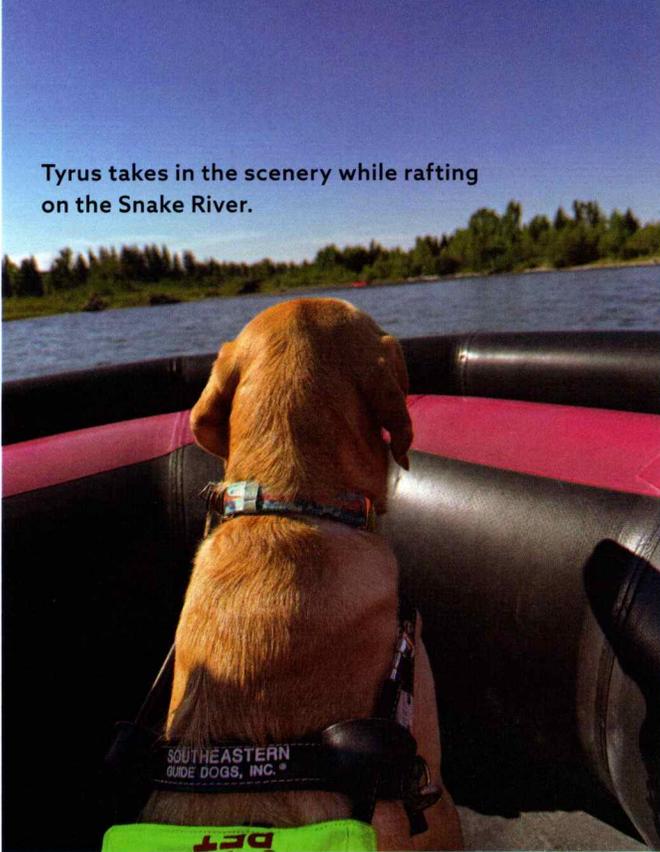
**T**heir success as a team delights Christie Henry, director of canine development at Dogs Inc. Henry trained Tyrus and says it feels "amazing" that the duo is enjoying so much travel together.

"It's more of a paycheck than my paycheck," she says. "Jackie is a natural handler and really loves her dog, and she did from the moment we put him in her hands. But it's still hard work to become a working team. When you see a guide dog team that's been together awhile – and Jackie and Tyrus are a great example of that – they kind of look like they're on autopilot. They look like they're reading each other's minds. And she's handled him consistently to the point where they function as a very smooth team now."

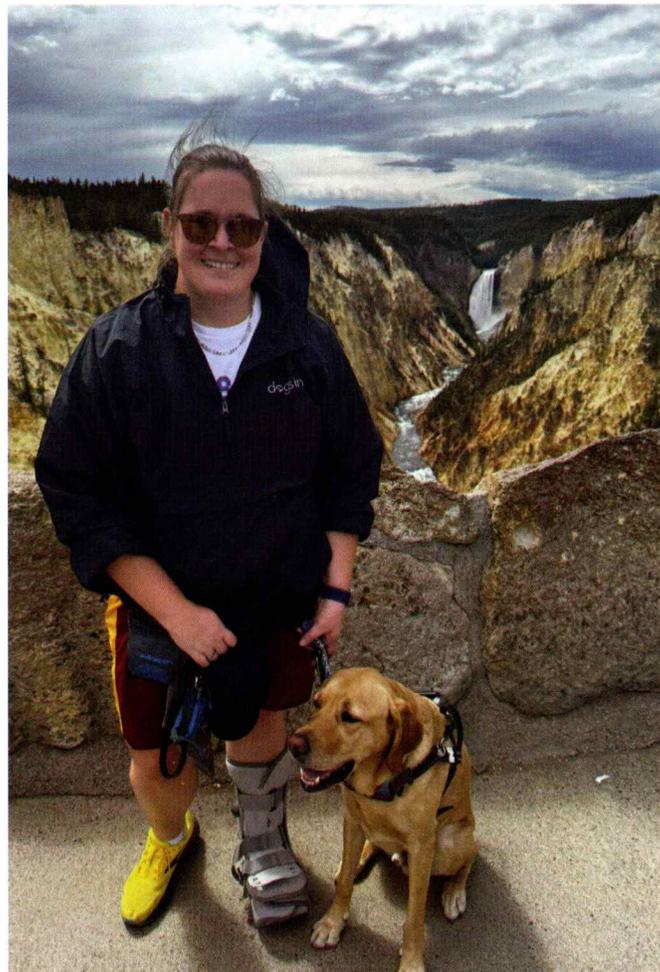


At the Smoky Mountains National Park.

Tyrus takes in the scenery while rafting on the Snake River.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JACKIE SCHIEMANN



Traveling in Yellowstone.

Dogs Inc places around 65 guide dogs each year across the country, as well as skilled companion dogs for children with vision loss and service dogs for veterans with PTSD. All services, including ongoing behavior support and five years of dog food, are free.

The nonprofit (formerly called Southeastern Guide Dogs) almost exclusively breeds and trains Labs, according to Henry.

“The Lab is the gold standard for guide dogs worldwide,” she says. “They’re perfectly suited for this job. They’re adaptable and they’re just the right size. They’ve got this nice coat that’s easy for people to take care of. I’d guess I’d say they’re the most flexible, and it’s easy for them to fit into any kind of lifestyle.”

Labs training to become guide dogs learn “targeting” skills, such as finding elevators, chairs, stairs, doors, and in some cases, trash cans. Guide dogs also learn and remember which way to go in complex areas like college campuses and major transportation hubs like Grand Central Station, according to Henry.

Trainers use clicker training and other positive methods to help guide dogs feel safe performing “intelligent disobedience” – as Tyrus did when he refused to lead Schiemann into the path of a speeding car – and because it’s better for the human-dog relationship, she says.

“They have to be able to think independently, but they also have to be willing to work with a person,” she says. “Luckily, that is what we breed here. Tyrus is amazing, and we have so, so many other dogs that are amazing, too.”

For her part, Schiemann is thrilled to have partnered with an amazing Lab. She plans to keep traveling as much as possible with Tyrus, including an upcoming trip to the Saint Louis Arch, aka Gateway Arch National Park. Next summer, she hopes to visit Glacier National Park in Montana – which should prove interesting since, unlike most Labs, Tyrus is not a fan of water.

Ultimately, she’s excited to share all sorts of future adventures with Tyrus.

“I’ve been blessed to have every experience with him,” she says. “I wouldn’t trade him for the world.” 🐾

For more information, visit: [DogsInc.org](http://DogsInc.org).



Award-winning journalist **JEN REEDER** is former president of the Dog Writers Association of America and a member of the DWAA Hall of Fame. She became a self-proclaimed “crazy dog lady” after she and her husband adopted a lovable Lab mix named Rio. Visit her online at [www.JenReeder.com](http://www.JenReeder.com).