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## Take a Sunday stroll with your best friend

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Cristian Lazzari / Special to The Miami Herald

Miami Lighthouse for the Blind CEO Virginia Jacko -- who is completely blind -- walks with her service dog Kieran during last year's Walk, Waggle and Stroll, held to raise awareness for guide and service dogs.

Virginia Jacko is completely blind.

At 5:30 a.m. every Tuesday and Thursday, she walks about 800 feet to the gym across her condo. To get there, she cuts through a parking garage, finds the exit, gets to the door and walks across the building.

It takes her about 30 minutes. She does it with the help of her 3-old yellow Labrador, Kieran, a service dog.

"When I'm at the gym, I put the dog in a sit, and he stays there for an hour while I workout," said Jacko, CEO of the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind, an organization that provides vision rehabilitation and eye health services to those who have vision impairments or have completely lost their eyesight.

"Guide dogs are not pet dogs, they are working dogs," she said.

On Sunday, The Miami Lighthouse will be holding its fifth annual dog walk -- Walk, Waggle and Stroll -- dedicated to raising awareness for guide and service dogs. It will start at The Shops at Midtown Miami.

Cameron Sisser is organizing the event for the second year in a row. He said it is a leisurely one-mile walk.

"Anybody with a dog or without a dog can come," said Sisser, who is expecting about 250 participants this year. "It's a fundraiser, but it's also to raise awareness."

Angelica Coronel from Miami Lakes is planning to participate for the second time this year. She does not have a dog, but she said she does not feel left out going alone.

"You meet people who have service dogs, and you get to talk to them," Coronel said. "It's still worth it."

The idea for this walk came from Jacko and Sally Heyman, Miami-Dade County commissioner.

“Animals are a very important component to people’s life. Some people see them as family,” Heyman said. “This was a great way to bring attention to canines who provide assistance and help people.”

Heyman recently adopted Mocha, a nine-month-old Doberman, who will go to the walk if she finishes her puppy shots in time.

The walk welcomes service dogs, therapy dogs, police dogs and regular dogs.

Cindy Soell, district director of teacher recruitment for Miami Dade Public Schools, will take Sequoia, her therapy dog for the third year in a row.

“I like this walk compared to other walks,” Soell said. “It’s very intimate and lets the public have their mind open in tolerance and understanding to those that are of limited vision.”

This year, Soell organized a group of Key Club students from iPrep School in Miami to attend the walk, and encourage community volunteer service.

“I am happy to participate,” said Raveena Patel, a 17-year-old senior and president of the Key club at iPrep. “I expect happy people, but also aware people, commuting together and partaking in an activity that is for a great cause.”

There is a \$20 registration fee to walk, which includes breakfast and the event T-shirt. All donations collected will go to the Miami Lighthouse.

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