

Gucci leads the way at the City Chambers

No truly this is not all about councillors' expenses and the Lord Provost's underwear.

Gucci is a dog.

Edinburgh Councillor Derek Howie took some time the other day to introduce us to Gucci his new guide dog. She is a golden cross Lab/Retriever, and is very sweet indeed.



With a genetic eyesight disorder Cllr Howie has had several guide dogs before. His most recent Lloyd was very well known around the City Chambers and had joined Derek on his campaign trail when he became a councillor.

Our conversation is here :



ER : This is the Edinburgh Reporter podcast and today I am with Councillor Derek Howie. Derek, you've had a bit of an exciting week this last week somebody new has come into your life.

DH: Yes, indeed. It's a new person. I don't think that was too much of an exaggeration. That's an indication of how important this individual is. I need to explain the person in quotes has four legs and is my new guide dog called Gucci. Yes. GUCCI and she's very cool and very trendy and very proud of her name and she's one year and 10 months We qualified six days ago as a safe and competent working unit. And she is she's the lighter colour. Her mum and dad were both that lighter golden colour. And she's a cross between a lab and a retriever. Most guide dogs are crosses these days and that's a very common cross

ER : So they are not pedigree, but they are cross pedigree

DH: Yes they try and mix it. I think it's better for their health. And also they try to get the best out of the different breeds.

ER : So we are here in your office and Derek she has a beautiful new bed with stars on, obviously explaining and extolling her position in your life. And at the moment, you know, you're you're relaxing in the chair and she's got her head under your feet. So she's already well used to you how, how long have you known this dog and how does how does that training thing come about?

DH: Yes, well, today is what the ninth of October I was introduced to Gucci in August that's a couple of months ago. She came to see me twice in August in my flat. The Guide Dog Association brought her down and they explained in advance that they were looking to match Gucci with me. Just to explain the re-application – because every time you have a new dog that involves an application – Gucci is dog number six for me, and my previous guide dog Lloyd was due to retire.

ER : He was a star in the City Chambers everybody knew him by name and loved him. And he was black of course.

DH: He was a cross lab retriever again but obviously a different colour. And he was nine. He's 10 next month, in fact, and when they're round about nine, ninth birthday, the process for the next dog begins. That's when the paperwork, all the application paperwork is done again. So just an update because, you know a new dog is needed approximately every eight years or so.

ER : And did you take to this dog quickly?

DH: Yes, oh yes. Well, the second visit at home was an overnight and my daughter Hannah was at home with me at the time – she was at home for both visits. And Gucci,

particularly on the second visit, was flying around the flat and it was fun on the laminate flooring because I'm sure you can imagine. She wasn't allowing any for any braking at corners shall we say.

ER : So she was skiting round just getting to know it.

DH: Yes she was skiting round – loved the balcony. She likes going out onto the balcony and likes to see where the other cats and dogs and birds are. She has a bit of a feather distraction. That's an official distraction that she has with feathers and birds. So we have to work with that. They've all got some sort of distraction the dogs.

ER : You're literally putting your life in her paws as it were. Because she then becomes your your eyes to get round the city. Now I met you this morning when you had I think just walked from home to The City Chambers. Is that right?

DH : Well, we went via the gym. That's important Phyllis. I will throw that into the conversation. Because I get the bus. I used to walk everywhere and Edinburgh until a few years ago, I decided that it was going to get too busy and a bit too risky because Edinburgh is getting busier and busier. And my eyesight has been reducing over the years because I have a condition called retinitis pigmentosa which is a progressive eye disease. So the combination of the busyness of Edinburgh and the deteriorating sight has resulted in me using buses more than I used to. So this morning I got the bus down to the George Square area, to Buccleuch yonder, and walked through to Edinburgh University gym at the Pleasance. I've been going there for a few years. I did a session which was an hour ish.

ER : And what did you do? What do you do with the dog while you're at the gym?

DH: The dog takes me around all the different machines in the gym.

ER : Wow, that's amazing.

DH: And she's fine. And she just lies beside me when I'm on the machines. She's very good at chilling out and very good at looking cool, and attracts all sorts of attention and comments from other gym users, staff and anyone else who happens to be there actually, she's already a big star and she's only been on the scene a few weeks.

ER : She's beautiful and you know I wish you all the all the very best with her. I know you were very attached to Lloyd but I suppose that's my final question really is, you know, do you not become too attached to one particular dog and too dependent on them and then it becomes difficult to let go?

DH: Well it's an important point you raise because the bonding aspect of the guide dog is very, very important actually, because the dog really becomes an extension of your left arm. You know, you always want the dog on the left. You're together 24 hours a day, literally. And the strength of the bond is is huge.

And that's an important part of getting to know a dog and the bonding, because you really want that dog to be using its initiative to the maximum in order to make sure that you are safe. That is the priority and it's the priority for the Guide Dog Association is my safety. Obviously I've got to be competent. We've got to be a competent unit as well and safety is paramount.

ER : Tell me a little bit about Lloyd. Where is he?

DH: Well, Lloyd is away to a couple in Bruntsfield who've been walking him since he was two years old and I met them at the gym. They would take him out two or three times a week up Blackford Hill Observatory Hill.

ER : Ah for a real run around

DH : Yeah. They have a great time. The retirement plan was formulated a year or two ago. On 1st September Lloyd was officially confirmed as adopted by Nick and Lucy, so that has all happened. And Gucci and Lloyd have met because I'm still in touch.

ER : And can they go for walks together?

DH : Yes they've already been for one up on Blackford Hill for about 30 minutes a couple of weeks ago and Lloyd he's quite timid. He's quite a gentle sort of soul is Lloyd, and he's quite submissive. And that's quite the opposite of Gucci who's not submissive at all. She's quite dominant and quite robust in our place. She's a serious player and plays to win. And she was bossing Lloyd around big style for that half hour on Blackford Hill. So Nick and Lucy will take Gucci out on her free runs along with Lloyd.

ER : That's great, a great story and I'm so pleased that to meet your your new your new dog. It's great to see you with your independence to Derek.

Thank you very much indeed for speaking with us.

DH: Well thank you. You're welcome.