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MEDIA RELEASE

UP and South African Guide-Dogs Association for the Blind sign agreement to collaborate

PRETORIA – The University of Pretoria (UP) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the South African Guide-Dogs Association for the Blind (GDA). The three-year agreement aims to strengthen and reinforce an existing informal collaboration that spans many years.

Established in 1953, the GDA is a non-governmental organisation whose mission is to enable visually and physically impaired members of society, including children with autism, to live independent lives through freedom of movement and the acquisition of skills required to live a fully participatory life.

The GDA is the first and only accredited member of the International Guide Dog Federation in sub-Saharan Africa, and one of only two accredited members on the continent. It is also the first South African member of Assistance Dogs International.

UP Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor Tawana Kupe said the signing of the MoU is an opportunity to pool resources in the service of others. “As we embark on this formal partnership, let us always remember that great things grow from small beginnings. I look forward to seeing the tangible results of this collaboration, which pools expertise and resources and fosters learning with the goal of serving others.”

Professor Vasu Reddy, Dean of UP’s Faculty of Humanities, will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the partnership’s specific projects. He said that by formalising this relationship, UP is reaffirming its commitment to transdisciplinary research. “This partnership is important to the Humanities because the nature and benefits of the human-animal nexus opens up new avenues for our Humanities-based scholars to explore. Our relationship with service animals such as guide dogs in particular reminds us of our own humanity, our capacity to be compassionate, and that trust is an interdependent relationship – these are areas that we as humanists love to study.”

According to the agreement, UP and the GDA are looking to collaborate in the following areas, among others:

- specific research in disciplines such as Veterinary Science;
- collaboration with UP’s Disability Unit in the Department of Student Affairs;
- inclusion and diversity events at open days and UP’s Welcome Day for new first-year students.

The parties also hope that the collaboration will create an opportunity for the critical analysis of the relationship and interdependency of humans and animals, which will ultimately lay the foundation for a transdisciplinary research group.

“The GDA will be celebrating its 70th year of service to the South African community in 2023, and the signing of this MoU with the University of Pretoria will undoubtedly enhance the excellence of services delivered,” GDA CEO Vernon Tutton said. “It is a mutually beneficial relationship with platforms for innovative research and research outcomes. It also illustrates the complexity of the operations that we are responsible for, and the contribution that both our organisations make to the lives of the differently abled in South Africa. We thank Prof Tawana Kupe and his team for welcoming the South African Guide-Dogs Association for the Blind into the fold.”

Tanya Schonwald, Head of Strategic Corporate Partnerships at the GDA, said collaboration between the NGO sector and higher education is an imperative to ensure transfer of knowledge, translation of research into

practice, and serving the South African community. “The GDA is of the opinion that with this collaboration and partnership, a new example will be set for cooperation between universities and NGOs in South Africa.”

Caption: Vernon Tutton and Prof Tawana Kupe with Otis, a service dog

Media enquiries

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on the Hatfield Campus, Pretoria. This 114-year-old institution is also the largest producer of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country that has a Faculty of Veterinary Science which is ranked top in Africa, and overall has 120 academic departments, as well as 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 55 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes.

UP is one of the top five universities in South Africa, according to the 2019-2020 rankings by the Center for World University Rankings. It is also ranked among the top 100 universities worldwide in three fields of study (veterinary science, theology and law), and among the top 1% in eight fields of study (agricultural sciences, clinical medicine, engineering, environment/ecology, immunology, microbiology, plant and animal sciences and social sciences).

In May 2020, the annual UK Financial Times Executive Education Rankings once again ranked GIBS as the top South African and African business school. The University also has an extensive community engagement programme with approximately 33 000 students involved in community upliftment. Furthermore, UP is building considerable capacities and strengths for the Fourth Industrial Revolution by preparing students for the world beyond university and offering work-readiness and entrepreneurship training to its students.

For more information, go to www.up.ac.za

ABOUT THE SOUTH AFRICAN GUIDE-DOG ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

South African Guide-Dogs Association for the Blind assists visually and physically impaired members of our society, including children with Autism, to live independently through the provision of Assistance Dogs and acquisition of skills required to live a fully participatory life. GDA provides Guide Dogs, Service Dogs and Support Dogs as well as training in Orientation and Mobility skills and the use of the White Cane. GDA is a registered NPO and PBO in South Africa, an accredited member of the International Guide Dogs Federation (IGDF) and member of Assistance Dogs International (ADI).