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## **Achievers: Guide dog brightens life for man with tunnel vision**

Ken Hedler/The Daily Courier

PRESCOTT - Deteriorating vision from retinitis pigmentosa, or tunnel vision, cut short Ed Kunitz's career as a taxi driver 11 years ago, and he stopped driving altogether.

"It got to the point where it was too dangerous for me to drive," said Kunitz, whose vision deteriorated to a 5-percent field of view. Doctors diagnosed him with the hereditary disease at age 40.

Kunitz, 60, and a Prescott resident for 13 years, said he began spending more time at home.

"I'd be on the computer until I got bored," he said. "I watched TV until I got bored, and I'd go back on the computer."

However, Kunitz's life has changed because a driving - or walking - force has entered his life and gave the Army veteran its full attention: Monty, a black Labrador retriever.

Kunitz said he walks as many as five miles a day with Monty, and goes out more often at night, when he is almost totally blind.

He obtained Monty's companionship after graduating March 14 from the month-long training program at Guide Dogs of the Desert in Whitewater, Calif., near Palm Springs.

He said a friend told him about the nonprofit organization four years ago, and he eventually applied eight months ago.

"I kept putting it off and putting it off," Kunitz said about applying to the organization.

Guide Dogs of the Desert graduates only six blind people at a time, and they range in age from their 20s to 80s, said Kim Laidlaw, director of public relations. Kunitz and other students lived in a dorm on the premises.

Kunitz, a native of Lindenwold, N.J., is one of several residents of the tri-city area who have graduated from the program since Guide Dogs of the Desert opened in 1972.

Prescott Valley resident Turalee Smith, who does not know Kunitz, said she graduated 10 years ago, and has enjoyed guidance from Harley, a golden retriever, since then.

"I love Guide Dogs of the Desert," Smith said. "It has helped me tremendously. It has helped me to become a lot more independent with Harley."

Smith said Harley keeps her safe, adding the dog will disobey Smith's orders to proceed if Harley detects a danger, such as an approaching car. Kunitz said he used a cane before Monty joined him six weeks ago.

"Now with Monty, I'll be able to come and go," he said.



Ed Kunitz of Prescott walks with his new guide dog, Monty, at the courthouse plaza in downtown Prescott this past Monday. Kunitz obtained the black Labrador retriever after graduating from a month-long program at Guide Dogs of the Desert in Whitewater, Calif.