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INFORMATIONAL PACKET FOR THE 2024 PSDP CONVENTION

The annual Psychiatric Service Dog Partners Convention is an event where people with mental health disabilities can learn more about working with their service dogs, have public access training and testing, and celebrate the freedom of going out and having fun with other service dog teams.

For sponsorship opportunities, see <https://www.psychdogpartners.org/sponsorship> for more information. Scholarships may be available for future conventions. See <https://www.psychdogpartners.org/scholarship> for more information.

Location & date

Good times and good friends await you in **Rock Hill, South Carolina!** Our main convention activities will take place in the 1904-square-foot Palmetto A & B (joined) rooms of the *Hilton Garden Inn* at 650 Tinsley Way in Rock Hill.

Activities are planned starting on Friday night, **April 26th**, through Monday, **April 29th**. Many people are arriving on or before April 25th and leaving on April 30th or May 1st, so there may be additional chances to get together with other PSDP community members around the time of the convention. Monday this year will be an (optional) excursion to the fun and interactive Discovery Place Science in nearby Charlotte, so we have more of the much-desired time to socialize with each other out in the world.

The Hilton Garden Inn in Rock Hill, SC is in walking distance of a breadth of eateries, a shopping center, a movie theater, and a large park. Breakfast is included in the room rates. You are responsible for your own food, but we will go in groups to restaurants within walking distance.

Travel & lodging

Rock Hill, South Carolina is just over the Carolina border from the very active Charlotte, *North* Carolina airport. It's about a 25-mile drive from the Charlotte Douglass International Airport to the Hilton Garden Inn at 650 Tinsley Way in Rock Hill. Without heavy traffic, this trip usually takes a half hour or so.

The cost (in November of 2023) of a one-way Uber or Lyft* ride is around \$45–\$63, and a taxi is roughly \$68 (no tip in these figures). Download the Lyft or Uber app and sign up to use either of these services. The rideshare (Uber/Lyft) and taxi pickup areas are on the Arrivals/Baggage Claim (lower) level.

The hotel is just off Highway 77 at the Dave Lyle Blvd. exit (79), set back on a small road loop behind the Manchester Village Shopping Center. Restaurants etc. are walkable from the hotel for most folks. Contact the hotel at (803) 325-2800 for current information about the hotel shuttle (historically only for within five miles of the hotel).

Convention-goers staying on site usually don't need to have a car during the convention. However, you will need to get yourself to and from Discovery Place Science in Charlotte on Monday. A taxi from the hotel to Discovery Place Science is about \$68 (one way, no tip) and Uber is \$88–\$106. You might want to arrange a carpool instead; parking is \$17.

Our group rate at the hotel is \$129/night (excluding taxes), which includes breakfast. More information is available on the registration page:

<https://www.psychdogpartners.org/resources/convention/2024-convention/2024-registration>

*PSDP is not endorsing or recommending Uber, Lyft, or any ride service.

Upon arrival

It's not just you who feels the stress of travel, but your dog does, too. We highly recommend that when you arrive, before joining in with whatever the group is doing, you take a minute and relax with your dog. You have no obligation to check in with any social groups you may see on your way in, and everyone understands if you don't. Water yourself and your dog, maybe take a quiet walk together, or enjoy a power nap. Make sure that you and your dog are relaxed. This will help you and your dog have a better time, and will make it easier for your dog to focus on you instead of on the many other service dog teams there!

On Friday and throughout the convention, take advantage of the unique opportunities available. You will be surrounded by helpful, friendly, and experienced people who also want a great convention experience. Make friends and get contact info to continue to benefit from your shared adventures! Try to squeeze in working together on training during convention downtime. Sometimes training takes two people; consider training such things as alerting to the presence or approach of others, responding to being "down and out", etc.

Schedule

Please note that the schedule and activities are subject to change without notice.

The default location for activities on this schedule is the Palmetto A & B joined rooms of the Hilton Garden Inn in Rock Hill, SC, on the evening of April 26th through April 29th. Monday's (April 29th) excursion will be to Discovery Place Science in Charlotte, NC.

Convention-goers must sign in at the convention meeting room—at the latest, just before the mandatory welcome meeting. In case you want to print just the schedule (rather than have it on your mobile device), it is on the next full page so you do not have to print the entire info packet.

2024 Schedule

Friday, April 26th

Friday afternoon: soft start, teams hang out in/around lobby & informally go to dinner

7–7:30 p.m. Sign-in, goodie bags, meet & greet

7:30 p.m. Welcome meeting (mandatory)

Saturday, April 27th

9:00–10:00 Social breakfast outside (optional)

10:00–12:30 SDIT Manners Evaluation & Public Access Test (*mandatory PAT lunch at the end, cost not included in PAT fee*) (optional)

10:00–11:30 Informal hangout for non-testers and team photos shoots with Deanna

noon–1:30 Lunch on your own (non-testing can join testing teams; schedule approx.)

1:20 *Committee meeting (closed meeting)*

1:30–3:00 Handling self-doubt & other challenges of being a service dog user

3:00–3:45 Break

3:45–5:00 Fun, easy games and team photo shoots with Brad

5:00–7:00 Dinner on your own

7:00–8:00 Social hour (informal)

Sunday, April 28th

9:00–10:30 Social breakfast

10:30–1:30 Glencairn Garden & picnic lunch

1:30–3:00 Handling interactions with the public/gatekeepers (with practice)

3:00–3:45 Break

3:45–5:00 Training Q&A with dog trainer Katie Jesseph

5:00–7:00 Dinner on your own

7:00–8:00 Decompression and closing thoughts, room cleanup

Monday, April 29th

9:00–10:30 Social breakfast

10:30–on Tourism day: Discovery Place Science in Uptown Charlotte

Activities

Soft start, sign-in, meet & greet, welcome

You can socialize in/around the hotel as you're comfortable during our soft start. Teams informally go out to dinner nearby before the 7:00 p.m. sign-in, goodie bag, and socializing time. The mandatory 7:30 session includes a welcome by Dr. Veronica Morris, convention policies with the planning committee, and introductions. Friday is all about settling in, saying hi to old friends, meeting new ones, and sharing in the excitement of the convention!

SDIT Manners Evaluation & Public Access Test (PAT)

On Saturday morning, Veronica and Katie facilitate PSDP's Service Dog in Training (SDIT) Manners Evaluation and Public Access Test (PAT). The fees are \$40 for the Manners Evaluation and \$50 for the PAT. For each test, there is a maximum of six teams, where a team is one dog and one person. If you didn't sign up online before Friday, get in touch with Veronica as early on Friday as you can to sign up for any remaining spots.

Social breakfasts and other meal times

These are informal times together. We encourage you to bring your filled breakfast plate and utensils to an outside area for a safer group experience. On Saturday, public access test-takers will eat lunch together around the Manchester Village fountain, but you don't have to be taking the PAT to eat with others.

Informal hangout for non-testers and team photos shoots with Deanna

If you aren't out taking a test, we encourage you to relax and socialize with other teams between breakfast and lunch. Deanna will create digital portraits for teams who want to document their bond.

Handling self-doubt and other challenges of being a service dog user

From "imposter syndrome" to unexpected training hurdles, Veronica will facilitate an exploration of our unique challenges and how to deal with them. Bring your questions and share your tips. We all benefit from developing our group wisdom!

Fun, easy games and team photo shoots with Brad

Enjoy a relaxed game of service dog bingo with prizes. Also, unleash your inner model! Take this opportunity to experience the joys of a fun and easy photo shoot that'll memorialize the special relationship you have with your dog. Brad's sessions are first-come, first-served Saturday afternoon and night.

Social hour

Saturday night is a time to relax and have fun with other PSDP convention-goers. Arguably the best kind of activity at the convention, there will be ample opportunities to have nice chats with your peers.

Videos and pictures for the PSDP community (throughout)

Throughout the convention, PSDP volunteers will take pictures and occasionally record video to help the cause. (Let us know clearly if you'd prefer we don't identify you by name.) Wear PSDP green if you have it!

Glencairn Garden & picnic lunch

Going out with a large group of service dog teams inspires incomparable feelings. We aim to have those feelings in a beautiful setting—Glencairn Garden in Rock Hill. This serene public park has a multitude of plants and flowers, plus paths where you're free to go off in a small group for our optional scavenger hunt. Not only will we have bonding experiences, we'll have a lovely picnic lunch catered by an area restaurant. Load into the shuttle for the 10-minute drive at *10:20 going* and at *1:10 coming back*.

Handling interactions with the public/gatekeepers (with practice)

How do you handle that rude shopper or that “No dogs!”-insistent employee? What about the well-meaning person who knows “I shouldn't pet your dog, but...”? This session mixes theory and skill development. Share not only tips, but if you want to, get in the practice with routines that achieve your own goals, once you identify them. It's so gratifying and helpful to prepare in a low-stakes environment!

Training Q&A with dog trainer Katie Jesseph

Dog trainer and PSDP community member Katie Jesseph is knowledgeable, yet very accessible. See why she's a great choice to lead a question and answer session that covers any dog training issue that's been holding you back or capturing your curiosity.

Decompression and closing thoughts

Share what this convention has meant to you, what you've learned, and what you'd like to see next time. You'll also hear what to expect after the convention. Many attendees find this session essential to preparing their brain for re-entry into the world outside of our community cushion of understanding.

Tourism day: Discovery Place Science in Uptown Charlotte

At 10:30 Monday morning, we'll leave the hotel (via your own transportation) and head for Discovery Place Science (301 N Tryon St) in Charlotte, North Carolina—beginning our outing as tourists for the day! This is a great place to interact with fun exhibits and each other, making memories to carry with us for years. Restaurants with outdoor seating are available nearby.

Policies & procedures

Bring your least-scented products to this low-fragrance event; some are allergic.

This is a completely nut-free event in indoor PSDP spaces. Do not bring any human or dog products containing nuts (including coconuts).

No weapons or illegal drugs will be permitted at this event (pocket knives are OK, as are any medications for which you have a prescription).

The consumption of alcohol or illegal substances is prohibited in PSDP spaces.

Convention-goers are welcome to do as they want outside of our convention activities.

Disruptive/inappropriate behavior may result in being required to leave PSDP spaces for a length of time proportional to the situation, at PSDP representatives' sole discretion.

Food

We will have optional times to gather and eat meals together outside, but you must provide/buy your own food. You can bring food from home if you prefer.*

There are [many restaurants within walking distance](#) and some grocery stores within a drivable distance. We suggest you use Google Maps to explore these options. On regular overhead view (non-satellite), zoom in close enough and the names of the restaurants appear on the map.

*As a reminder, this is a nut-free event. Do not bring any human or dog products containing nuts. Also, alcohol consumption is prohibited in PSDP spaces.

Team behavior policy

Expected level of behavior/training

This is a convention for handlers with service dogs and service dogs in training. As such, we expect that all attending dogs will be friendly with other dogs and people. Teams displaying aggressive behavior will be asked to leave. If you prefer your dog be given extra space, we encourage you to signal this to others by tying yellow ribbon (available at the convention) to your dog's leash or collar.

When deciding whether this convention is appropriate for you and your dog to attend, look over the minimum requirements of PSDP's Service Dog in Training (SDIT) Manners Evaluation (<https://www.psychdogpartners.org/resources/public-access/manners-evaluation>). Teams should have a reasonable expectation, based on previous training, of being able to pass the SDIT Manners Evaluation. If you do not reasonably expect to be able to pass the SDIT Manners Evaluation with your dog at the time of the convention, or your dog has been known to be uncomfortable around other dogs or people, this convention may not be appropriate for your dog.

Before embarking on this trip, it's wise to ensure you and your dog are comfortable in the following situations: traveling on public transit, walking in a mall or crowded store, visiting restaurants, being in close quarters with other dogs and people, etc.

Team behavior requirements at convention

When you are around other service dogs, keep your dog within 2 feet of you, and keep at least 3 feet between dogs at all times unless people say it is OK. Be sure to get permission first before your dog or you greet another team. It's the handler's job to ensure their dog is not invading another team's space. This is an on-leash convention, and dogs should never be left unattended at the activities.

All dogs must be kept leashed to a collar, vest, or harness at all times, and the leash must always be held by a person. There are no exceptions, apart from disability-required situations that are approved in writing by Veronica Morris before registration. This includes when your dog is relieving itself, unless in a gated/fenced area designed for this purpose (and then only if others present explicitly agree). This rule includes *all*

PSDP activities. If you use a shoulder leash and it isn't long enough for your dog to lie on the floor next to you while it's on your shoulder, please remove the leash from your shoulder and maintain a secure hold on it so your dog is never untethered from you.

Please be prepared to clean up after your dog. Bring appropriate bags and products to ensure that we leave the facility in the same condition that we found it or better. We are representing PSDP and all other teams by our behavior in public at this event, so it's important we all obey these behavior standards.

If you have two service dogs, or a service dog and an SDIT, be aware that you will not be allowed to leave any dog unattended, even in your hotel room. You must be able to handle both dogs safely yourself, or bring a human helper who can handle one of the dogs for you at the event.

Disruptions

The convention involves unusual situations and can be unexpectedly stressful for teams, so you and your dog might not behave as you're used to. If your dog is disruptive or destructive for any reason, we expect you to remove your dog from the situation and train/calm them before returning. If you witness a team grossly misbehaving (e.g. biting or fighting with another dog, repeatedly eliminating inappropriately, etc.), please report it to at least one of the people in charge as soon as possible.

Letting out a single, nonaggressive woof doesn't necessarily require you to remove your dog. However, if your dog's behavior goes beyond this (making noises at other dogs, sustained barking/growling, sustained tense body language, etc.), we expect you to be on the safe/non-disruptive side and remove your dog to train/calm before re-engaging. If this happens more than once, be attentive to whether this convention is in the best interest of your dog.

Convention attendance depends on following the instructions of convention leadership.

Elimination policy

For sanitation reasons, we ask you to prevent your dog from eliminating on any building, vehicle, or structure. All solid waste must be picked up immediately. If a dog has elimination problems in indoor spaces, it will be asked to leave.

In addition, we ask participants to be conscientious in adhering to our P.U.P. policy—“Pick Up Poop”. If you see any dog waste in addition to your own dog's and you are able to pick it up, please do so! Our efforts to leave the area better than we found it are a great way to spread good will around our convention and toward our community.

Extra assistance recommendation

Some people need extra assistance from a person, beyond what our participant-volunteers can provide. If this might apply to you, we strongly recommend you bring/register a friend or family member who can help take care of your needs. Our participant-volunteers are not there as trained professionals, therapists, or veterinarians/behaviorists, but as fellow peers who just want everyone to have a good experience.

Minor policy

This is not a family vacation type of event. The convention is for handlers of psychiatric service dogs (PSDs) and psychiatric service dogs in training (PSDITs), and the activities will be geared towards these individuals. Children with PSDs or PSDITs are welcome to attend with a guardian, but please keep in mind the convention is a chance for people to speak freely about their mental illnesses and this may include discussions of self-injury, abuse, nightmares, and flashbacks. It is up to each guardian to ensure their child is either OK with these discussions, or to remove the child from these discussions. If you have any questions, please email us at psdpinfo@gmail.com.

Sales policy

PSDP may authorize products/services to be offered, such as team testing.

People sometimes bring gear to swap or sell on their own at the convention. Any offers by convention-goers of products or services for sale cannot be conducted in PSDP spaces during organized activities. Consistent with [List Rules 8 & 9](#), personal requests on the listserv for information to facilitate sales are prohibited.

Anyone selling items is personally responsible for security, financial transactions, and customer satisfaction. PSDP is not responsible for anything involving sales to which PSDP is not directly a party.

Public health measures

We're serious about protecting/respecting each others' health. Masks are encouraged indoors and KN95s will be available. We continually ventilate the meeting room. Anyone who is feeling unwell should expect to isolate/visit urgent care. The same goes for your dog.

Emergencies

Service dog medical—(1) Emergency: Carolina Veterinary Specialists at 760 Addison Avenue in Rock Hill, (803) 909-8300. (2) Urgent care: Urgent Vet at 870 Gold Hill Road #102 in Fort Mill, SC (803) 486-2550.

Human medical—(1) Emergency: Piedmont Medical Center at 222 S Herlong Avenue in Rock Hill (803) 329-1234. (2) Mental health crisis: Crisis Text Line, text 741741; National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, call 988; SC mobile crisis team (833) 364-2274. (3) Urgent care: Doctors Care at 2174 Cherry Road in Rock Hill, (803) 325-8280.

Weather

History-based predictions for Rock Hill put the temperature range at 52°–76° F. The chance of precipitation each day is around 28%. Check the forecast and bring layers.

Packing list

This list is only a suggestion of items you may want to bring. Wear clothes suitable for outings. The packing list is on a single page in case you want to print it without printing the whole info packet (and you don't just want it on your mobile device).

Packing list

- Clothing, including layers, long pants, shorts, t-shirts, and long-sleeved shirts (PSDP green/logowear is encouraged!)
- Extra underwear and socks
- Pajamas
- Sweatshirt or jacket
- Hat for warmth
- Sunglasses/hat/ballcap to protect from sun
- Comfortable shoes to walk or hike in
- Soap and shampoo (unscented, please!)
- Deodorant—unscented
- Sunscreen—unscented
- Toothbrush and toothpaste (human & dog!)
- Brush or comb (human & dog)
- Camera & film/storage, batteries & charger
- Airline SD paperwork
- Vaccination records
- Masks
- Medications, including prescriptions, over-the-counter pain meds, and motion-sickness meds
- Games/cards
- Water bottle
- Emergency contact & medical info for you and your dog
- Dog dishes
- Dog food
- Dog medication
- Towel for your dog
- Poop bags
- Service vest if you use one
- Collar/harness and leash
- Dog treats
- Charging adapters & cords: phone, camera, etc.
- Dog toys
- Portable dog watering bowl
- Bag for dirty items
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ACCIDENT WAIVER AND RELEASE OF LIABILITY FORM

I HEREBY ASSUME ALL OF THE RISKS OF PARTICIPATING IN ANY/ALL ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THIS EVENT, including by way of example and not limitation, any risks that may arise from negligence or carelessness on the part of the persons or entities being released, from dangerous or defective equipment or property owned, maintained, or controlled by them, or because of their possible liability without fault.

I certify that I am sufficiently fit, have sufficiently prepared or trained for participation in this activity if appropriate, and have not been advised to not participate by a qualified medical professional. I certify that there are no health-related reasons or problems which preclude my participation in this activity.

I acknowledge that this Accident Waiver and Release of Liability Form will be used by the event holders, sponsors, and organizers of the activity in which I may participate, and that it will govern my actions and responsibilities at said activity. In consideration of my application and permitting me to participate in this activity, I hereby take action for myself, my executors, administrators, heirs, next of kin, successors, and assigns as follows:

(A) I WAIVE, RELEASE, AND DISCHARGE from any and all liability, including but not limited to, liability arising from the negligence or fault of the entities or persons released, for my death, disability, personal injury, property damage, property theft, or actions of any kind which may hereafter occur to me including my traveling to and from this activity, THE FOLLOWING ENTITIES OR PERSONS: Psychiatric Service Dog Partners (PSDP) and/or their directors, officers, employees, volunteers, representatives, and agents, and the activity holders, sponsors, and volunteers;

(B) INDEMNIFY, HOLD HARMLESS, AND PROMISE NOT TO SUE the entities or persons mentioned in this paragraph from any and all liabilities or claims made as a result of participation in this activity, whether caused by the negligence of release or otherwise.

I acknowledge that PSDP and their directors, officers, volunteers, representatives, and agents are NOT responsible for the errors, omissions, acts, or failures to act of any party or entity conducting a specific activity on their behalf.

I acknowledge that this activity may involve a test of a person's physical or mental limits and carries with it the potential for death, serious injury, and property loss. The risks include, but are not limited to, those caused by terrain, facilities, temperature, weather, condition of participants, equipment, vehicular traffic, lack of hydration, and actions of other people including, but not limited to, participants, volunteers, monitors, and/or producers of the activity. These risks are not only inherent to participants, but are also present for volunteers.

I hereby consent to receive medical treatment which may be deemed advisable in the event of injury, accident, and/or illness during this activity, in cases where I am unable to give/deny consent at the time.

I understand while participating in this activity, I may be photographed. Unless I make it clear otherwise to anyone engaged in the recording of my likeness, I agree to allow my photo, video, or film likeness to be used for any legitimate purpose by the activity holders, producers, sponsors, organizers, and assigns.

The Accident Waiver and Release of Liability Form shall be construed broadly to provide a release and waiver to the maximum extent permissible under applicable law.

I CERTIFY THAT I HAVE READ THIS DOCUMENT AND I FULLY UNDERSTAND ITS CONTENT.

I AM AWARE THAT THIS IS A RELEASE OF LIABILITY AND A CONTRACT AND I SIGN IT OF MY OWN FREE WILL.

Participant's Signature Date Participant's Name Age
(Please print legibly.)

Parent/Guardian Signature Date
(If under 18 years old, Parent or Guardian must also sign.)