

OUR STORIES, OUR OWN OUR PAGE

- DARIN & BRENDA LEE

Magnolia Point resident Darin Lee is technically blind. It's a fairly recent development which forced him to retire from a 26-year career in law enforcement, and years in Afghanistan as a DOD International Law enforcement expert. He lives with his wife Brenda on the corner of St. Andrews Court and Colonial Drive; their home was featured in the October 2022 issue of The Magnolia News, [here](#).

Darin navigates daily life with the help of a Guide dog, 'High Speed', a Premier Labrador both loyal, loving, and highly trained in her mission of finding safe passage for Darin in his daily activities. Last fall, while Darin and High Speed were walking down Colonial Drive, the driver of a golf cart failed to yield to the stop sign on the corner of Shinnecock. This forced High Speed to take a defensive maneuver to protect herself and Darin from getting hit. Words followed. This actually happened twice in a 2 week period, prompting the Lees to even meet with the owner of the club. First, some history:



According to Brenda, "Darin waited close to two years for High Speed once all the physician interviews, documents, extensive background checks, attendance for mandatory four months OMT training (mandatory to receive a service/guide dog) were all completed and organized by the nationally accredited school. He was then invited to meet new his partner and attend a rigorous 24/7 training program with her. Once successfully completed, we had to sign extensive legal contracts, undergo spot unannounced home visits, and several other contractual obligations."

"Just 2 years old, High Speed was raised by a private highly trained "puppy raiser" until going to Darin. She lives everyday at 100% high speed and loves to "work". When she is not "working" she loves to cuddle, but only on Darin's lap or directly at his side. There is an amazing, impenetrable bond that forms immediately between the Service/Guide Dog and the Master/Handler. You may hear experienced Master/Handlers refer to their partners as their super heroes."

Because Colonial Drive is narrower in the Lee's neighborhood than roads elsewhere in the community, it was unsafe and hazardous walking on the shoulder side of the road for Darin and High Speed. While others (who are sighted) walk their dogs, they can see vehicles coming at them and move out of the way, if and when they get too close. Darin does not have any such visual cues. High Speed is Darin's eyes and ears. It took 3 months to get signage on Colonial installed, on the recommendation of the Green Cove Springs Police Department and the Florida Highway Patrol, a process that was not without its own frustrations and challenges.

"She can be found everywhere Darin is," Brenda says, "There are a lot of people that do not understand the life of a blind or visually impaired person who can show you the boundaries of their own yard, every step of their house, including where every single piece of furniture is, and every single light switch. However, now that we have the signs posted on the road outside our property on Colonial, High Speed and Darin are back to taking their 'controlled command walks' every day and throughout the day, but now much more safely."

She adds, "We would really love to please respectfully ask everyone's assistance when they see Darin and High Speed by slowing down and moving over to allow plenty of room for everyone."

