

Crucial Companion By Stephanie Charalambous

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Phillip Chalker and 'Roddy' are calling on the community to get behind Seeing Eye Dogs Australia Photograph: Tom Morrison

Phillip Chalker will never forget the moment he met his new seeing eye dog Roddy late last year.

"I was lucky to get to pick out of two dogs, but this dog wouldn't give the other one a chance to say hello to me," Phillip said.

"I got a big lick right on my face and two paws up on my shoulder, as if to say 'pick me, pick me'."

The black Labrador is Phillip's second seeing eye dog following Kransky, who retired due to arthritis.

"Kransky kind of had the cheeky temperament, licking girls' legs and all that," Phillip chuckled.

"Roddy, when he's not in a harness, has got a really boisterous child in him."

The Traralgon musician has retinitis pigmentosa and can only see shadows out of one eye.

He said seeing eye dogs had brought him independence, freedom and confidence.

“I wouldn’t be out and about and doing things if I didn’t have my seeing eye dog,” Phillip said.

“Canes can’t help you like a dog can.”

As well as generally guiding Phillip, two year-old Roddy helps him to find bench seats and even his favourite stores, following some positive reinforcement.

“You go up to the store, say the name of the store and give the dog a treat and by the third time, the dog’s got it,” Phillip said.

“Eventually they know half of your town.”

Phillip is encouraging the community to get behind Seeing Eye Dogs Australia, to help others who are blind or have low vision find their own canine companion.

Each seeing eye dog costs about \$35,000 to train and there is currently more than a year-long wait list for people in need.

SEDA is calling for regular donations through ‘puppy sponsorship’ to support its breeding program.

To make a donation or become a puppy sponsor, visit [SEDA](#) or phone 1800 037 773.