



December 29, 2011

K9 learning to handle life after work

*By Kathleen Gray
Detroit Free Press Staff Writer*

Rudy's put on a few pounds since he retired in September, and his muscles are starting to ache.

And he's bothered by all the attention the annoying new pup in his home is getting.

After eight years as one of the dogs in the K9 unit of the Oakland County Sheriff's Office, Rudy the German shepherd now spends his days relaxing.

He has the run of his family home and 9-acre yard in Fowlerville. And life is good when he plays with what only a dog could consider the best toy in the world — a green tennis ball.

Isn't that what retirement is all about?

For the dogs in the canine unit, work is often grueling and intense. Rudy has chased down robbers and thieves, stopped suicides, tracked down marijuana, heroin and cocaine. Once, he ran 4 miles after a guy who ditched his car and ran off from a traffic stop.

And even though Rudy has gracilis myopathy, a degenerative muscle disease, he still trots to the front door every day, hoping to hop into the Sheriff's Office's SUV, when his handler Deputy Dave Roddy, 42, puts on his uniform and leaves for the night shift.

"It's almost sad to see it. He's got this long look on his face every day when I leave," Roddy said. "I really miss him on the job. He's one of the best tracking dogs I've ever seen."

Rudy was among six dogs to retire from the office in the fall.

"The canine unit is all about value-added policing," said Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard. "Being able to bring them in to track is a great tool and their noses are incredibly sensitive. They can find things we could never find."

He recalled how one dog tracked down a big cocaine stash in a Nevada drug runner's car.

"We couldn't find anything, but the dog kept hitting on the gas tank," Bouchard said. Officers used a special camera to locate the cocaine in the tank.

The program has been so successful, Bouchard said, that organizations and individuals, including Detroit rock legend Bob Seger, have donated money to sponsor the \$10,000 cost of buying and training a dog.

The handlers can purchase their retired dogs for \$1.

Since retirement, Rudy has gotten more attached to Roddy's wife, Robin Roddy, and now, instead of looking to the deputy for permission, he obeys her when she tells him to sit.

"And I let him get away with more. If he doesn't come right away or sit, I say to myself, 'So what,' "

Dave Roddy said.

He can't be that way with Charge, the Belgian Malinois he bought last year from a breeder in West Virginia and trained. At 17 months old, Charge spends his downtime in a dog crate because he needs to rest after a hard day's work.

In addition to going in to their work with handlers, the 16 members of the K9 unit do an additional day of training every week. The job takes a toll: Three of the dogs that retired in the fall have died.

"These dogs are in great shape. But they'll run till they drop," Roddy said.

Rudy and Charge get along, but are jealous of one another, Roddy said, noting that Charge will fly across three rooms in the house if he sees Roddy petting Rudy. And Rudy bit off part of Charge's ear during a fight over a toy.

"For the life of me, I don't know what it is about this ball," Roddy said as Charge jumped against his chest trying to retrieve the tennis ball.

And for Rudy, retirement isn't all R&R. Roddy helps out with a deer-tracking service, basically renting Rudy out to help hunters follow the blood trails of wounded deer.

Contact Kathleen Gray: 313-223-4407 or kgray99@freepress.com
