



February 1, 2009

Deputy Yeager is on patrol and sniffing out crime

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Oakland County Sheriff's Deputy Sherry Long, a veteran law enforcement officer with 20 years on the force, started patrolling about a month ago with a new partner - a rookie – who took the oath of office just last week.

"He's about 14 months old. It will take a full year before he's well-rounded in everything he does," said Long, who watched as her canine colleague was sworn in by Oakland County Clerk Ruth Johnson and make his mark - a paw print on the record.

Yeager, a German shepherd trained in tracking and in sniffing out explosives, is a full-fledged member of the Oakland County Sheriff's Department K-9 unit with the same kind of protections as his human partners - anyone who willfully or seriously harms him could face felony charges, now that he is a sworn deputy.

He trained with Long for six weeks at the Oakland Canine Academy before starting patrols with her shortly after Christmas 2008. His name, which Long chose, means hunter in German. And that's exactly what he does on the job.

NOSE KNOWS

"Yeager is a bomb dog. He can do things we can't do as humans. He's able to locate things by sense of smell rather than visually. It makes our job easier. It'd probably take six or seven deputies to clear a school in the same amount of time."

He's cross-trained to track, a skill that can help find lost children, recover evidence, find suspects who are on the run or return Alzheimer's patients to safety.

"A little girl lost her hearing aid rolling down the hill at home. One of our dogs was able to locate it. Something that simple makes you feel good."

Yeager lives with Long and her family, which includes parents, her husband, children, a Lhasa Apso-Bishon mix named Sammy and Rocko, Yeager's retired predecessor.

Rocko, trained solely as a bomb dog, worked with Long for nine years, after she moved from regular patrol to the K-9 unit.

"When I first started (with the unit) in 1999 I was the only bomb dog handler in the area, other than the state police," she said, adding that the county's K-9 unit expanded from five to 14 dogs over the past 10 years.

MOMENT'S NOTICE

In addition to working, training and living with their canine partners, K-9 unit deputies are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"The main thing is availability with our job. I have kids, but my parents live with me, that makes me available to go out. If there's a suspect on the run, you must get there immediately," she explained.

Long said Yeager and his two canine house mates "get along great." Because Yeager works all day, his "down time" is at home, after work. Most pet dogs experience just the opposite. They lounge during the day and are ready for play when their human companions return from work.

"We don't do a lot of playing and working at home. We don't want them to be bored at work."

Although dogs can be "easier to get along with" than human partners, they also steal the limelight from them when they're in public.

"Citizens pay more attention to the dog," Long said, with a laugh. People who recognize her from patrolling townships - especially the Highland area - are more likely to ask where her dog is than how she is.

"The kids just love them," she noted. "They're great for PR."
