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## Volunteer Search Dogs

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By: Capella Tucker

**Dogs serve many functions in our society. They help the blind and the disabled, they help police in a variety of functions. Dogs can also be man's best friend in searches. While many police agencies train canine units, some dog owners volunteer time and money to train their own pooches to help the community.**

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For at least eight hours a week and one weekend a month, volunteers train their dogs how to search for missing persons in all kinds of situations from lost people to kidnappings to disaster recovery and cadaver searches. Greater Houston Search Dogs Chairman Tim Schewe says it can take up to two years for dogs and their handlers to be certified to assist law enforcement.

One difference between search dogs and police canines is the dogs Schewe works with must be people-friendly with no aggressive tendencies. Next, they try to figure out what motivates and focuses a dog, some like to work for games like retrieving balls, others like to work for food. With no hesitation, Shadow chases Schewe for the reward. The next step in training is to get them to use their noses.

The dogs are certified in different types of search techniques. One is called "trailing" where the dog is given an article with the scent of a specific person. The dogs use the winds to catch the scents that everybody naturally gives off. The dogs let people know they have found a person in one of two ways, one way is to go back to their handler, who tends to trail a little ways behind a working dog, and lead them to the victim. The other way is for the dog to stay with the victim and continue to bark until their handler makes it to them. Along with the dogs, handlers have to be certified for searches. They have to learn how to read the cues their dogs will give during searches. Schewe has learned to read his dog.

This time it's a practice run, looking for a missing person who has climbed a tree. The handlers are the dogs motivators also getting just as excited as when a search is completed, real or practice.

The Greater Houston Search Dogs offer support to law enforcement and respond to calls from official agencies, such as the Laura Recovery Center. They average up to 20 calls a year for assistance and have traveled as far as Florida to help with last summer's hurricane recovery.

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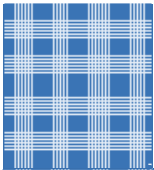
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