

## Portraits of Help

Capt. Bill Monahan and Hunter searching



PHOTO BY LIZ BREAULT

## The Critical Work of the National Disaster Search Dog Foundation - based in Ojai

### FINDING SURVIVORS FAST

When a disaster strikes - like the 1995 **Oklahoma City bombings**, 9/11 or the 2010 **Haitian earthquake**, the task of trying to find human beings - who are alive but buried under rubble - is indescribably difficult. The emergency of the situation is

compounded by the fact that every hour that is lost searching through the rubble is an hour lost on the probability of finding more survivors. Most of the people buried are badly injured - and many will not survive if they are not found within hours. With the 'out of sight' difficulty, human rescuers are relatively

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useless because their sense of smell is so poor. That's why having highly-trained rescue dogs is so critical to the relief operation. The dogs are specifically trained to pick up the scent of a live human being - even though that person may be out of sight and buried deeply under rubble. These skilled dogs are perfectionists when it comes to sniffing out and finding their target. Furthermore, they love doing it because they think it's a game.

### THE FOUNDER: WILMA MELVILLE AND THE OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING CATALYST

Just over 15 years ago, Wilma Melville, a retired Physical Education school teacher from New Jersey, and a grandmother with 4 grown sons, had recently acquired a black Labrador named 'Murphy', and she took him to training. They became a fine canine search team - attaining their Advanced Disaster Search Dog certification with FEMA. In 1995, Wilma and Murphy were deployed to the bombed Federal Building in Oklahoma City. What the disaster highlighted was that there were too few certified search dog/handler teams in the country. In fact, in 1996,



Wilma Melville, Founder of National Disaster Search Dog, with 'Murphy'

there were only 15 advanced certified disaster search and rescue dogs in a country as large as ours. Wilma's mind was made up after the heartbreaking experience of Oklahoma City. She was determined to find a better way to create highly-skilled canine search teams - in preparation for any future large-scale disasters that may occur.

### THE PLAN: FIND THE RIGHT DOG; MATCH IT WITH THE RIGHT HANDLER; TRAIN PROFESSIONALLY

Wilma soon drew up a plan that combated the potential pitfalls of her ambitious program: She says, "It is imperative that you find the right dog. Next, you match the dog with the right handler. The third component is the professional training." Wilma founded the National Disaster Search Dog Foundation with this three-pronged approach. The Foundation chooses the dogs - most of which are 'Rescues' from Shelters, or they've been donated. There's absolutely no need to breed or buy the dogs. There are enough 'hunting breeds' needing homes, and the Foundation immediately puts them to work and keeps them busy and happy. Labradors, Golden Retrievers, Border Collies and German Shepherds all have the right instincts for the job, and those that are mixed breeds with some of these characteristics are just as valuable for the job. The dogs are matched with First Responders

- usually Firefighters - who give the dogs that structured discipline that they need. Equally as important, the Firefighters are already certified in disaster response and they have the skills to save lives.

### SAVING LIVES 9/11

When the World Trade Center was attacked on September 11, 2001, Search Dog Foundation (SDF) responded immediately, providing 13 teams at Ground Zero. The dogs' exceptional training was invaluable during the tragedy. They were fully able to withstand the irregular, shifting surfaces caused by the rubble and they coped magnificently with the difficult task of finding survivors who were buried underneath the collapsed buildings.

### JANUARY 2010 HAITIAN EARTHQUAKE

After the magnitude 7.0 earthquake hit Haiti in January 2010, destroying most of Port-au-Prince, Canine Disaster Search Teams, trained by the Search Dog Foundation (SDF) went straight into action. They were airlifted into the disaster zone on a C-17 military cargo plane as part of the 72-member California Rask Force 2. Soon after landing, the teams began identifying buildings with a high probability of survivors, and the dogs started combing the wreckage. Several aftershocks from the earthquake make search and rescue operations even more precarious and urgent.

### JANUARY 15: HUNTER AND DAKOTA FIND SURVIVORS

At 1:15 p.m. on January 15, SDF's dog, Hunter, found three girls, trapped alive for 3 days. Capt. Bill Monahan and Hunter were searching a neighborhood near the Presidential Palace when Hunter pin-pointed the survivors' scent under several feet of broken concrete. He barked - alerting Bill to where the victims were trapped. Bill spoke to the survivors and managed to hand them down bottles of water, after which they extricated the girls from the wreckage and provided them with first aid.



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The 2010 January Haiti Earthquake disaster. 'Baxter' searches for survivors with Gary Dunan

### HURRICANE KATRINA: 2005

Marshia Hall gives this first-hand account of their rescue mission after Hurricane Katrina: "I was deployed with my dogs Trapper and Shade. We were searching residential subdivisions and it was a river of debris. You couldn't tell where one house began and another ended. There were eight to ten houses smashed together in some areas, with debris piles the length of a city block. We worked 12-hour shifts, stopping often to rest the dogs. The debris was piled so high the humans couldn't penetrate it, but the dogs could go subterranean very quickly. They could also go in very small spaces - places we could never have gotten into."



America's Tire sponsors 'Maverick' and Firefighter, Jason Vasquez of L.A. Task Force 2

### METROLINK TRAIN CRASH IN CHATSWORTH

On September 12th, 2009, a Metrolink commuter train collided with a freight train in Chatsworth, killing 25 and injuring over 100. Once again, SDF's dogs were there in full force, searching for survivors and bringing comfort to some of the devastated families.



The dogs love their handlers. 'Hunter' and Bill

### CORPORATE SPONSORSHIPS

SDF is truly a one-of-a-kind non-profit (501c3) agency and is addressing a critical gap in America's emergency response network. They receive no government funding whatsoever. Instead, private donors and corporations have stepped in to help. **America's Tire** is one local corporation that generously sponsors L.A. Task Force 2 - handler Jason Vasquez - and his dog, 'Maverick'.

SDF are proud to announce that they are building a **National Training Center** on a 125-acre historic ranch site - located in the foothills of Santa Paula. The land was donated to them by the **Frank Mc Grath Family** of Ventura County. At this center, rescued dogs will become rescuers; new Search Teams will be trained, and existing Search Teams will receive the advanced deployment training needed to face the most demanding rescue operations. The targeted opening date is 9/11/11 - ten years to the day after the 9/11 disaster. By opening the center on that day, they are honoring those who perished in the tragedy of 9/11, as well as those who over the years - have risked their lives to save others. 🐾