25 YEARS AFTER THE OKLAHOMA CITY TRAGEDY: HONORING THE 168 LIVES LOST

THE TRAINING MUST GO ON: STAYING FOCUSED ON OUR MISSION IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

MEET THE CANINE RECRUITS CURRENTLY IN TRAINING!
THE TRAINING must go on

We often use the phrase “our SDF family” to describe our strong, resilient and supportive community, and we’ve never been more grateful to have you as part of this family.

Because of your generosity, we are able to continue our operations, even as federal and state restrictions limit travel and gatherings. In accordance with these guidelines, all Search Dog Foundation (SDF) staff who are non-essential to onsite campus activities are working remotely to carry out our mission and are available to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Our canines who live on campus are receiving their regular search training and lots of love from our canine care and training teams. The dogs go on daily hikes, complete core strength workout sessions in the canine gym and spend plenty of free playtime in the yards.

Of course, our dedicated staff members are taking every precaution with regard to extra sanitization measures and physically distancing themselves from each other while still ensuring our canines get the mental stimulation, physical engagement, and care they deserve.

We are also actively in touch with our teams and task forces in the field to assess their needs and provide support. Our Handler Grant and Canine Healthcare Funds continue without interruption, and we are thrilled to share that several Lifetime Care dogs have found new “fur-ever” homes, despite these challenging circumstances. See page 11 for our latest Lifetime Care success stories!

We are also excited to announce that our next Search Team Graduation Ceremony will occur later this summer!

New handlers from Sacramento and the Bay Area in California, as well as two veteran handlers from Lincoln, Nebraska, will join us at our National Training Center for a modified, appropriately distanced Handler Course before being handed the leashes of their new canine partners.

This ever-evolving situation has required adjustments and we assure you that the work you’ve supported continues, even in these difficult days. We remain committed to our canines and the search teams across the nation that act as a life-saving resource during and after disasters.

Thank you again for your steadfast belief in our mission—we couldn’t do our work without you.

-Your SDF Family
We invite you to take a behind-the-scenes peek at a typical day in the life of an SDF Canine Care Specialist (CCS) as they care for our canine recruits in training, from head to tail. Every part of the day is specially designed to nurture each dog’s physical, mental and emotional health and allow them to thrive in their new careers as search dogs.
On May 7, Alameda County Fire Department responded to a commercial building explosion in San Leandro, California. Alex Mengell & Gunner were requested by the department to confirm no one was still in the building, as there were reports that five people were inside at the time of the explosion.

Arriving first responders found a heavily damaged warehouse. The center of the roof had blown off and collapsed inside the building, leaving large amounts of debris. Alex shared his experience with us:

> I received the call from home and responded to the site, finding a large warehouse, about 100 feet by 200 feet, with roof debris outside and heavy damage inside with multiple potential void spaces. After speaking with the San Leandro Police Department, I felt comfortable running Gunner. Starting with a perimeter search, Gunner showed no indication of human scent, so we proceeded inside.

Although the outcome is not what we hope for, we are grateful these canines and their handlers could give the victims’ families some closure in the wake of this tragedy. Our thoughts go out to the families of those involved in the accident and we thank the first responders, both two- and four-legged, for helping the rescue and recovery effort.

On January 27, three SDF-trained teams deployed to search for two missing people after a vehicle rolled over a hillside in the Granite Hills area of El Cajon, California. Aide Barbat & Delta (San Diego Fire-Rescue), Clint Schepe & Georgia (Chula Vista Fire), and Billy Walkenhorst & Victor (Santee Fire) searched the area near the wreckage, but the dogs did not alert and rescuers sadly concluded the occupants of the car did not survive the crash.

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Unfortunately, this area is popular with runners and beachgoers despite sand and rocks having collapsed before. The San Diego County Sheriff’s Department was on scene with human remains detection dogs and requested our teams conduct live find searches.

Both Delta and Blake covered the small area and did not show any interest or alert. Shortly after, the human remains dogs followed and also did not alert, which meant that, thankfully, no one was trapped beneath the pile of sand. This marks the first deployment for Blake, and both he and Delta searched very efficiently, making us all proud.

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FORMER SHELTER DOG TURNED SEARCH DOG HELPS FIND MISSING NY CHILDREN

Just after 7 p.m. on the evening of April 7, Search Teams Adam Leckonby & Luka and Brian Girard & Keila of New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services and New York Task Force 2 received a call from the Schenectady County Emergency Manager to assist in searching for two missing siblings in a rural, heavily wooded area of Rotterdam, New York. Both dogs are former shelter dogs who were found and trained by SDF before being partnered with their first responder-handlers.

The 12-year-old boy and 14-year-old girl were familiar with the area and had set off on an adventure walk earlier in the day; however, after five hours and with darkness and rain setting in, search and rescue crews were called in to help find them.

Since Brian & Keila were driving from Westchester County, where they had been deployed to assist in special operations related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Adam & Luka were the first team to arrive. As Adam & Luka began to search, a drone and helicopter flew over the search area, using thermal imaging to attempt to find the missing children.

The area has rugged terrain with many steep cliffs and ravines, as well as abundant and potentially dangerous wildlife. Adam knew the search would be challenging and also knew that time was of the absolute essence—as temperatures began to plummet while the rain continued.

A 911 call was received from a homeowner approximately two miles from the command post who reported that the children may have been near the property, and, as Adam planned his search strategy, he wanted to have Luka search a hilled area near the home first.

Luka, however, had other ideas.

When Adam released him, Luka insistently searched downhill, in the opposite direction of the intended area of focus. In that moment, Adam reverted back to his training and remembered the enduring canine trainer adage, passed down through generations of handlers:

**Trust your dog.**

Rather than calling him back in the other direction, Adam and the search party followed Luka’s lead, listening to the rustling of leaves to keep track of Luka’s movements in the pitch-black darkness.

After nearly an hour of searching, Luka showed intense interest in a deep ravine that was difficult to access. The team worked their way around the void, and when Adam thought he heard a noise, he leashed up Luka and called out in hope of hearing the children answer.

When he did not receive a response, Adam prepared to release Luka to search once again, to find out why Luka was so interested in the ravine. In his training, Luka was taught to pinpoint the strongest scent source that he can physically reach and alert with a loud bark to let Adam know that he has detected live human scent.

Adam knew Luka was on to something but needed to get a little closer to the ravine and creek to survey the area and assure it was safe to let Luka off-leash again.

Just as Adam was about to release Luka to search, one of the children called out to the rescuers—Luka had led them directly to the children.

Though they were cold and wet, the kids were uninjured. Adam and his teammates gave the children their jackets to warm up and Luka got lots of ear scratches for a job well done.

As his reward in training, Luka gets to play a game of tug-of-war with the humans he finds, and this night was no different.

This time, he got to tug with the children he had found.
HONORING THE 168 LIVES LOST IN THE OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING
As an agency dedicated to evolving and advancing to address the dynamic needs of the emergency response community that we support, we also keep a guiding principle instilled within us by our founder, Wilma Melville, at the center our work.

That philosophy is to keep asking ourselves, “what comes next?” while keeping one foot firmly planted in the past—recognizing special milestones in our history and never forgetting where the Search Dog Foundation began.

From our Founder, Wilma Melville:

**168 is engraved on my heart.**

On April 19, 1995, many of our lives were changed forever when a terrorist bomb ripped open the side of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, killing 168 and injuring many more. First responders from across the country answered the call to aid in rescue and recovery efforts, including me and my disaster search dog, Murphy.

While this tragedy marked the beginning of the Search Dog Foundation, it has never been about our organization, but about the lives we lost and the many rescuers who worked tirelessly to find and help others in the aftermath.

After my deployment to Oklahoma City, I set a personal goal of seeing SDF not only train, but certify 168 canine disaster search teams—one for each of the lives lost.

Because of that life-altering experience, I made a vow to myself and the nation that we would create the first nonprofit organization to produce highly-trained disaster search dogs for our country, providing them free-of-charge to task forces and fire departments to help ensure that no survivors are left behind.

And boy, did we...together!

What started as a small group of volunteers, nearly as driven as the search dogs we trained, evolved to where we are today. Together, we have created an organization that continues to lead the way for providing support and strengthening disaster response in this country.

Since that fateful day 25 years ago, SDF teams have responded to 200 deployments around the world, rescued hundreds of dogs from bad situations, and made a difference in countless lives.

I was able to travel to the certification test in Phoenix, Arizona, earlier this year to see seven SDF-trained search teams pass their tests, completing my goal of creating 168 certified search teams.

My message for the handlers who certified in Phoenix and for all who have certified throughout our history: It’s important that we honor those people...that is what the 168 means to me. Having been a handler at that tragedy, it literally took my life and turned it in a new direction...that tragedy reached my heart.

**168 is engraved on my heart.**

Thank you for believing in our mission. Thank you for being Part of the Search!

— Wilma Melville

From the first three SDF Search Teams, partnered in 1997 (above right), to the group that achieved certification in Phoenix, AZ, in February 2020 (right), it has taken the entire SDF family to achieve Wilma’s goal of 168 certified canine disaster search teams – one for each life lost in the Oklahoma City bombing.
BOND & BONUS
RECRUITED FROM DOGS FOR BETTER LIVES IN CENTRAL POINT, OR
SPONSORED BY ANN COOLURIS

Born into the same litter at Dogs for Better Lives (DBL)—a fellow non-profit organization that professionally trains service and companion dogs in Central Point, Oregon—these adorable black Labrador Retrievers were career changed into SDF’s program due to their high energy. While that character trait isn’t ideal for work as an assistance dog, it makes them perfect for search and rescue work! Bonus had originally been adopted out to a family but was quickly returned to DBL because of his seemingly endless energy. Bond and Bonus were living with fosters while awaiting new homes, but they were deemed too energetic to place with families again and were sent back to DBL to find a more suitable place for them to thrive. Luckily, the partnership between DBL and SDF allowed both pups the opportunity to be evaluated as search dog candidates—an evaluation they passed with flying colors! Both boys are now part of our freshman class in training and we cannot wait to see what the future holds for these two superstars in the making!

CADENCE
RECRUITED BY SOUTH DAKOTA CANINE CENTER FROM SIOUX FALLS AREA HUMANE SOCIETY
IN SIOUX FALLS, SD

This adorable yellow Labrador Retriever was found wandering a residential neighborhood when someone alerted animal control. Cadence was taken to the Sioux Falls Area Humane Society, a long-time shelter partner of SDF’s that has provided many search dog candidates through the years. Cadence was evaluated by SDF recruiters in South Dakota when they saw her excitement over the tennis ball, and this former stray soon found herself on a private plane ride to Southern California with SDF’s volunteer pilot, Sean Moran. Cadence is doing well in her training so far and brings a smile to everyone who sees her in action, especially when she has her tennis ball.

CASSIE
RECRUITED FROM A PRIVATE DONOR IN RONAN, MT

Cassie’s previous owners had high hopes for success in the world of field trial, a competition that measures a dog’s hunting abilities. Unfortunately, Cassie was not a strong enough marker to continue as a competitor in that career, and her owner was faced with trying to find a new path for this lovable girl. Cassie’s owner knew that this bundle of energy needed a full-time job to keep her satisfied, and happened to notice SDF’s ad in a field trial publication. Sure enough, after reaching out, we agreed that Cassie had what it takes to enter training and begin a new career path as a search dog!

CHLOE
RECRUITED BY SOUTH DAKOTA CANINE CENTER FROM CHEYENNE ANIMAL SHELTER IN CHEYENNE, WY
SPONSORED BY ANONYMOUS DONOR

Chloe, formerly Seidi, had been with a family since she was a puppy, but as she grew she became “too much dog” for them to handle. They decided to surrender her to a local shelter in Cheyenne, Wyoming. From there, Chloe was re-homed with a person with disabilities and it quickly became clear that it was not a good fit due to her intense energy. Chloe was surrendered for a second time to the shelter where she waited again to find her “fur-ever” home. SDF recruiters with the South Dakota Canine Center immediately noticed this chocolate Labrador Retriever’s insatiable desire as they bounced a tennis ball while walking past her kennel run. The rest is history, as she easily passed SDF’s evaluation and has excelled in her search dog training.
**Cork**

Recruited by South Dakota Canine Center from Sioux Falls Area Humane Society in Sioux Falls, SD

Sponsored by Jill Bee and Westlake Women's Club - CFWC

Cork was discovered by SDF recruiters at the South Dakota Canine Center at the Sioux Falls Area Humane Society. Cork was only 18 months old and had already been passed between many homes in his young life. Each time he was returned to the shelter, the reason was the same: too much energy. Our recruiters nicknamed him Tigger since he was so bouncy—almost as if he had springs in his paws—when they brought him from the shelter to their home to evaluate this Springer Spaniel mix for SDF’s program. Cork is also resilient—his recruiters described him as a sweet soul, despite one of his previous adopters allegedly not treating Cork with kindness or patience. With the incredible help of volunteer pilot, Sean Moran, along with a welcoming party of SDF staff, Cork arrived safely in Santa Paula and was quickly accepted into search dog training!

**Leslie**

Recruited from Kaiser K9 in Catonsville, MD

Sponsored by Arc Aspicio

Leslie was generously donated to SDF by Kaiser K9 (an organization that trains single-scent detection dogs) based in Catonsville, MD. Recognizing Leslie’s search dog potential as a puppy, her owners reached out to see if SDF would be interested in welcoming Leslie into our programs. Since she was too young to join our training program when she first arrived, she spent her early months being fostered by SDF Director of Canine Operations, Tracy Darling, and her husband (and SDF handler) Eric Darling. Now, Leslie is ready to graduate with her new handler at the end of the summer and we look forward to big things from this little girl!

**Jax**

Recruited by Trevor Lawrence from Humane Society of Utah in Murray, UT

Sponsored by Lenny and Squiggy

Jax was surrendered to the Humane Society of Utah by his original family due to his high energy level, which had deemed him “unmanageable.” This spunky pup was then adopted by a new family that also struggled with his overabundance of energy. After just one week, Jax returned to the shelter where, thankfully, SDF Recruiter Trevor Lawrence discovered him when searching for SDF canine recruits. Jax is a great fit for our program so far and has enjoyed every minute of training since day one.

**Mac**

Recruited from a private donor in Bumpass, VA

Sponsored by Patricia Snyder

Mac was found in a shelter in Virginia by a wilderness search and rescue handler looking to find a second working dog. She had high hopes for Mac, given his innate drive and intellect, but unfortunately, her current search dog made it very clear that their household was not fit for both dogs and Mac would not be a welcomed addition to their pack. Luckily, the handler is a friend of SDF training partner Teresa MacPherson, who had a perfect career recommendation for this toy-driven and athletic black Labrador Retriever. She recommended Mac to SDF, and after his initial evaluation, he made the journey all the way to California thanks to volunteer pilot Sean Moran who quickly jumped at the chance to transport this lively pup! After a smooth flight and formal evaluation, Mac was accepted into our program with a few happy tail wags and has been enjoying his training ever since!

**Forrest**

Recruited by Train-A-Rescue from a private donor in Sweet Home, OR

Sponsored by Farmers Insurance

This handsome black Labrador Retriever found himself with a rescue group in Oregon when his former owner’s living situation changed abruptly. When the rescue saw his working dog potential, they contacted SDF to begin the evaluation process. After his testing videos were approved by SDF’s training team, Forrest was transported to Southern California by SDF volunteer pilot, Sean Moran, who shared that he jumped right in the plane as if it were just a funny looking car! Forrest is quite a large dog and trainers were impressed with how gracefully he moved across the rubble pile during his formal evaluation at our campus, which he passed beautifully. Forrest is now working on building his drive and learning to bark for the toy.
BARK ALERT

**MATTIS**
RECRUITED BY CHARLIE FREEMAN FROM A PRIVATE DONOR IN LILLINGTON, NC
SPONSORED BY CAROL GEORGE AND ROGER STEWART

Mattis is an 18-month-old German Shepherd Dog/Belgian Malinois mix from Lillington, NC. His original owner brought him home as a 7-week-old puppy but, unfortunately, it soon became clear that he was not a good fit for their family due to his high energy, toy drive, and his owner's recent life changes. Mattis is very friendly and good with kids and other dogs, but he is so obsessed with the rope toy that he will not stop to eat or drink as long as the rope is in play. All of these traits made Mattis a perfect fit for a career as a search dog! A close friend of Mattis’ original owner contacted SDF while researching working dog organizations. After passing his initial evaluation with Recruiter Charlie Freeman, Mattis hitched a ride with fellow Recruiter Holley Murray on her cross-country road trip to SDF’s training center, along with two other new candidates. Mattis arrived at our campus in December and is now officially part of our junior class!

**NAVY**
RECRUITED FROM A PRIVATE DONOR IN ROGGEN, CO
SPONSORED BY THE JOEL AND DENA GAMBORD FAMILY

Born in the same litter, Navy (formerly Maverick) came to SDF along with his brother, Curly, from Colorado after growing up on a ranch in a neighboring state. With horses to play with and countryside to explore, these black Labrador Retrievers had plenty to keep them busy and expend their seemingly endless energy. As he began training for blood-sugar level detection, it became increasingly clear that Navy had way too much energy for this line of work and partnering him with a young child would not be successful. Instead, his trainer put him on a rubble pile to test his footing and desire for the toy. After Navy and his brother both flew across the pile with ease, she reached out to SDF and began making the arrangements for the brothers to fly to California. SDF volunteer Tim Turpin picked them up at the Los Angeles International Airport and brought them to their new home at our NTC. Once at SDF, Maverick was renamed Navy to honor SDF’s partnership with the United States Navy and the construction work their Seabees completed on our campus.

**STORM**
RECRUITED FROM INDIANA K9 LEARNING CENTER IN ELKHART, IN
SPONSORED BY JULIE CROKER

Storm, a beautiful red Golden Retriever, came to SDF from the Indiana K9 Learning Center. He had already shown promise as a working dog and was nearly placed with a detection agency when the center’s owner recognized that Storm would thrive as a disaster search dog, thanks to his high levels of energy and desire to work for his toy. Having visited our campus to learn more about our life-saving mission years ago, his previous owner knew that Storm would be well cared for and could achieve his true potential with SDF!

*Pictures in this publication thanks to Aide Barbat, Susan Bollinger, Tracy Darvick, Kate Horwick, Dane Mehl, Wilma Melville, Alex Mengell, Jenn Mueller, Amy Sandberg, Denise Sanders, Mussel Dogs, and Working Dogs for Conservation.*
OUR LIFETIME CARE PROMISE:
ONCE RESCUED, THESE DOGS WILL NEVER NEED TO BE RESCUED AGAIN

LIFE AQUATIC:
SUGAR FINDS HER NEW CAREER A LITTLE BIT SWEETER

When her former owner passed away, Sugar’s life was turned upside down and she found herself surrendered to Klamath Animal Shelter in Klamath Falls, Oregon. As her time ran short, the SDF recruitment team noticed Sugar on the website and the shelter staff did a quick evaluation and confirmed Sugar’s high toy drive!

After catching a ride with SDF volunteer Sean Moran, Sugar arrived at SDF’s campus for her formal evaluation with our training team. While she didn’t pass our screening due to some environmental sensitivity, she still had great working drive and we knew she would do well in a less stressful career.

Through our Lifetime Care program, Sugar was matched with Mussel Dogs, a group that uses canines to detect invasive aquatic species. Sugar has thrived in their program and recently received her odor certification and earned her new name as an official Mussel Dog—“Moomba.” Congratulations on all your accomplishments, Moomba—your SDF family is so proud of you!

CURLY’S NEW FRONTIER:
TAKING ON THE WILD WEST AS A CONSERVATION DETECTION CANINE

Growing up on a ranch, Curly and Maverick (later renamed Navy) were born to be working dogs and given wild-west themed names to boot! With impressive drive and dedication, these brothers started training for diabetes detection, but it became clear that a different job would be better suited for them.

Their trainer, thinking of their best interest and enjoyment for the future, tested them to see if their drive was more in line with search and rescue work and, sure enough, both appeared to have search dog potential. However, Curly soon showed sensitivity to environmental noise as he began training in our program.

Loud noises and other sudden changes in his surroundings startled him easily and, since disaster deployment situations are filled with both, our training team felt that Curly would not be happy or successful in an urban search and rescue career.

Given his natural talents and desire to use his nose, Curly was still in need of a job and our team looked for just the right fit. Curly (recently renamed Charley) is now with the Working Dogs for Conservation team in Montana, helping biologists detect endangered or invasive animals and plants.

In addition to scent training, which is going well, Charley has learned how to follow a routine by visiting the office and the field daily, how to swim in lakes and how to enjoy down time relaxing with his new family and coworkers.

We are so happy to have been able to help Charley find his renewed purpose in life as a conservationist!

HELP EVERY SDF DOG SUCCEED

If you are interested in joining our Lifetime Care Community, visit www.SearchDogFoundation.org/Lifetime-Care-Program to learn more. By joining the Lifetime Care Community, you help SDF fulfill our lifetime commitment to dogs who do not complete our training program but will go on to change lives as working canines or loving pets.
YOUR GIFT TODAY WILL HELP US TRANSFORM RESCUED DOGS INTO RESCUERS

The Rachael Ray Foundation™ has already donated $275,000 towards our goal of $525,000!

Help SDF raise the remainder by giving what you can today.

Your donation to the Search Dog Foundation will be put to immediate use to further our life-saving mission for canines and humans.

Whether they’re searching for survivors in the aftermath of disasters or bringing joy to families as beloved companions, let’s celebrate the hero in every dog!