



# BARKALERT

FALL 2021



# CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF SDF

For the last 25 years, the Search Dog Foundation (SDF) has been dedicated to training highly skilled canine search teams that respond to disasters throughout the United States and the world.

Tasked with finding survivors, these boots and paws on the ground not only provide precious life-saving resources to communities affected by earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, mudslides, and other tragedies; the dogs also offer comfort to the human rescuers who work tirelessly to help others.

Through August 2021, SDF has supported 185 certified search teams that have deployed to 216 disasters and missing person searches.

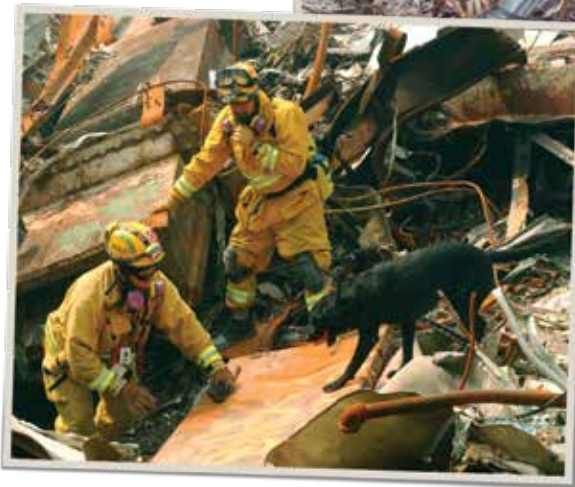
Thank you for being with us this last quarter-century. Your support and trust in SDF have made—and continue to make—a meaningful impact on our mission. We look forward to forging our path ahead with you at our side.



# We have not forgotten: **HONORING THE TWO- AND FOUR-LEGGED HEROES OF 9/11**

Twenty years ago, rescuers from all over the country responded to search for survivors in the rubble of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Among them were 13 SDF-trained canine disaster search teams at Ground Zero.

We are grateful for the service of the human and canine heroes who answered the call on September 11. And we work diligently each day to support new generations of canines and handlers who carry on their legacy. Together, we continue to learn, train, and prepare for the next time search teams are called upon to help those in need.



## **SDF-TRAINED CANINE DISASTER SEARCH TEAMS THAT RESPONDED TO GROUND ZERO IN SEPTEMBER 2001**

Rob Cima & Harley (El Dorado County Fire)  
Kelly Gordon & Buddy (Montebello Police  
Department)  
Randy Gross & Dusty (Sacramento Metro Fire)  
Rick Lee & Ana (Sacramento City Fire)  
Sergio Morariu & Tammy (Fremont Fire)  
Howard Orr & Duke (Santa Barbara County Fire)

Seth Peacock & Pupdog  
Jeff Place & Zack (Fremont Fire)  
Mike Scott & Billy (El Cajon Fire)  
Steve Swaney & Sherman (El Cajon Fire)  
Deresa Teller & Bella (Los Angeles Fire)  
Debra Tosch & Abby  
Ron Weckbacher & Manny



# From street urchin to star pupil: **MEET CANINE CANDIDATE NATE**

Nate's journey had a difficult start when he was found living on the streets with his owner and taken to the Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA in San Mateo, California. Due to a pending court hearing, shelter staff could not interact much with Nate; however, they noticed his high energy during what little time they spent with him.

As soon as they were allowed to play with Nate, the staff immediately observed his strong toy drive and affinity for a ball in particular. This desire to do anything for his favorite toy, coupled with his endless excitement and friendly demeanor, was a telltale sign of high potential for our program.

The Director of Behavior at the humane society reached out to SDF Canine Training Manager Mandy Tisdale, who had helped their staff with canine training in the past. Working closely with Mandy and our recruitment staff,

they assessed Nate's ability to be a search dog recruit through various performance tests.

The team effort paid off, and Nate, having passed the screening, was on his way to SDF as an official recruit. According to the volunteer pilot who flew Nate to us, he was a perfect "paw-senger" and slept most of the flight.

Nate continues to earn praise here at SDF and has quickly become a teacher's pet—always aiming to please and so happy when he knows you're proud of him! His sweet disposition and desire to learn make him a staff favorite and beloved by his generous sponsors, Kathleen and Steve Davis.

We're looking forward to seeing how far Nate's love of the toy will take him in his career. His journey is another shining example of why we believe rescued dogs lead the pack in potential!

## FINDING OUR DIAMONDS IN THE "RUFF"

The road to SDF for canine recruits is paved with watchful eyes, dedicated staff, and caring partners that are laser-focused on finding search dog talent and delivering these special pups to their new home. From October 1, 2020, through August 31, 2021, our team's efforts resulted in:



**44** states combed for recruits.

**290** shelters and rescue groups contacted.

**42,880** doggy miles flown with Angel Flight West, Angel Flight Central, Pilots N Paws, individual volunteers and commercial airlines.



**10** road trips to drop canine candidates off at our campus.



**52** dogs recruited into the SDF forever family.



# WORKING LIKE A DOG NEVER LOOKED SO GOOD

Candidates took the summer heat in stride as our trainers put them through their paces



Do you smell that? Cyrus catches the hidden victim's scent and homes in on the strongest source of it to provide rescuers with invaluable, pinpointed accuracy on the victim's location. Cyrus is sponsored by the Nahikian Family Foundation and an Anonymous Donor.



Dempsey tests his footing on the rubble pile during a search exercise with Trainer Alex Hill. Search dogs must be able to traverse uneven and unstable ground in preparation for deployment to a variety of disaster scenarios. Dempsey is sponsored by The Joel and Dena Gambord Family.



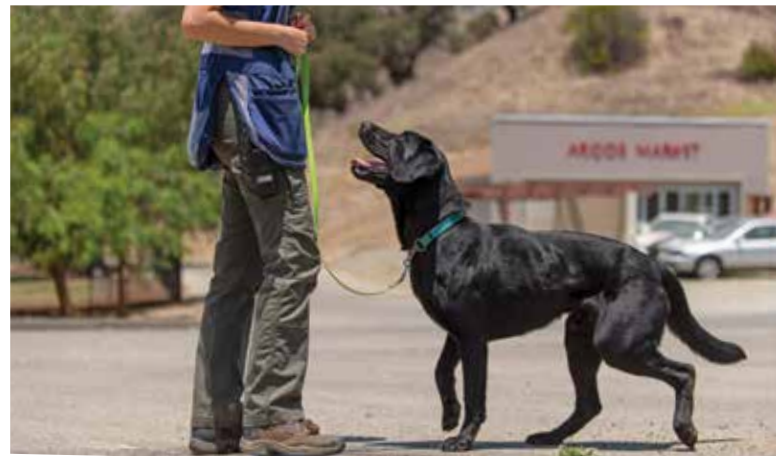
Scotty works with Alex on "direction-and-control"—a critical skill search dogs must master so they can be directed off-leash in areas a handler cannot access. Scotty, named in memory of Scott Mauck, is sponsored by Carol Marengo.



Dee demonstrates her amazing agility as she works the high plank with Trainer Abby Roeser. The ability to climb ladders and cross planks is essential for search dogs to access otherwise unreachable locations at a disaster site. Dee is sponsored by the Friends of Search and Rescue Canine Teams.



Ricky demonstrates his robust bark alert to let his handler know he has found his hidden victim! Searching a field of barrels is one of the first exercises a dog learns to master. The setup allows trainers to closely control the scent as they teach beginners how to identify and alert on the target odor. Ricky is sponsored by David and Barbara Barnhart.



Laser focus! Search dogs must be able to ignore all distractions as Nico demonstrates, paying close attention to cues from his trainer during an obedience and engagement session.



Chester and Canine Training Assistant Paige VanOordt spend quality time strengthening his trust in the canine-human bond and his desire to willingly participate in important aspects of his care, such as grooming, taking medication, and receiving treatment for injuries. Developing this “Cooperative Care” relationship is critical to a search team’s health and effectiveness in the field. Chester is sponsored by Julie Croker.



Endurance and strength conditioning are crucial for these canine athletes! Dodger tries for his best time in a Penn Vet Working Dog Center (PWDC) Fit to Work sprint test. Dodger is sponsored by Carol George and Roger Stewart.







## **THE ART OF PARTNERING A SEARCH TEAM**

SDF paired ten new search teams in two separate Handler Courses that took place in December 2020 and May 2021. The graduating classes were comprised of both professional and civilian responders from Northern California (California Task Force 4), Southern California (California Task Force 2), and Salt Lake City (Utah Task Force 1).

Throughout weeks of instruction, our trainers played both coach and matchmaker. In fact, our training team spends as much time observing the interplay between handler and search dog as they do equipping first responders with the knowledge and hands-on experience they will need to save lives after disasters.

Watching the handlers develop skills like leash handling, whistle work, and reading a canine's behavior, our trainers witness firsthand how the personalities of dogs and handlers gravitate toward one another. In a sense, the dogs choose their handlers, which becomes apparent as trainers assess each canine-handler interaction throughout the course.

Armed with intimate knowledge of the dogs they've worked with over the past eleven months, our trainers select the final pairings at the end of the course. Like humans, matchmaking a search team is an art form, and it's always a celebration to see a new team find their footing together.

Due to COVID safety protocols, our graduation ceremonies were streamed in real-time on social media, with SDF's essential on-campus staff there to cheer the new teams on. And, although the ceremonies were watched by most of our audience virtually, pride in their achievement was felt in real life.

As each team continues to work together toward certification, our trainers and staff will remain by their side, ensuring they are ready to deploy with their task force whenever and wherever disasters occur.

# TOPA: HEART OF A HERO

*From October 2020 through August 2021, SDF-trained teams served in ten deployments across California, Louisiana, Nebraska, New York and the island nation of Haiti. While our teams' missions typically focus on searching for missing persons and survivors after a disaster, the positive impact of their human-canine partnerships extends far beyond the "search." Topa and her handler Rudy are a perfect example...*

When concerned citizens in South Dakota called police to report a dog locked in a hot car, they could never have guessed they were saving the life of a future search dog. Topa, the rescued dog, didn't know it either, but fate had bigger plans for her.

After her rescue, Topa was transferred to the local animal shelter, where it quickly became apparent that she was no ordinary dog. Topa's personality and athleticism made her stand out immediately as a potential search dog candidate, and she headed to our campus for training.

Once at SDF, Topa thrived in our program. She passed her skills assessments with flying colors and, in September 2019, was paired with Rudy Valencia of the Berkeley Fire Department. The new team hit it off and soon achieved FEMA certification with California Task Force 4, making them deployable anywhere in the United States.

Maintaining FEMA certification takes consistent effort to keep search skills sharp, so Topa and Rudy work on them daily at their fire station. They were doing just that last May when a father and his daughter walked by on their way home from school.

As the pair passed by the fire station, suddenly another man emerged and began accosting them, yelling and appearing to try to grab the child. Terrified, the father and daughter sought help at the fire station.

While law enforcement responded to secure the situation, Topa responded by tending to the shaken girl, comforting her with snuggles and gentle licks. Rudy shared, "Topa's sweet soul and gentle demeanor were what was needed to help a very traumatized little girl gain some peace of mind again."

Topa's training makes her an excellent disaster search dog, but her loving personality and connection with humans are just as valuable to families in need. Topa is living proof that despite what happened in the past, given a second chance in our program, dogs can go on to do amazing things and be heroes of all kinds!

*Good girl, Topa!*





## Catch Up with Hawkeye: **FROM THE BIG HOUSE TO THE BUG HOUSE**

The last time you saw Hawkeye might have been when he won “Best Hair” in our 2018 Class Yearbook. At the time, he was living on our campus and, as it turned out, working with the trainers who would ultimately discover his true calling.

Taking no less than four turns, Hawkeye’s surprising career trajectory started with enrollment in an inmate canine training program in Wyoming, where his insatiable toy drive made him an imperfect fit. Next, he transferred to Freedom Service Dogs, a nonprofit organization that enhances the lives of people with disabilities by rescuing dogs and training them for individual client needs. Hawkeye’s sweet temperament made him great with people, but his obsession with toys persisted. He constantly wanted someone to throw a ball or play tug with him and would even bark at people if they ignored him!

Because of his laser focus and demand for more physical work, Freedom Service Dogs thought he might make a good search dog candidate. They reached out to SDF, and Hawkeye began his third career in our search dog training program.

Despite Hawkeye’s friendliness towards people, he showed uncertainty when placed in new, challenging environments such as the rubble pile. No amount of encouragement from our trainers could help him feel more comfortable on the uneven surfaces, which meant disaster search work was not for him. We knew there was a perfect place for this special boy, though, and we were right – eventually finding Hawkeye his ideal career match as a bed bug detection dog!

Hawkeye now leads a fulfilling life sniffing out bed bugs all around Las Vegas, and each day includes plenty of tugging and games of fetch for this playful canine. He doesn’t give up until the last pesky bug has been found – and we, his SDF family, will never give up on him!

**Good job, Hawkeye!**

*Photos in this publication taken by Berkeley Fire Department, Susan Bollinger, Kristy Gardiner, Los Angeles County Fire Department, Howard Orr, Dane Mehl, Denise Sanders, and Rudy Valencia.*



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