



# BARKALERT

FALL 2024



# CANINE RECRUITMENT

## UNLEASHING THE POTENTIAL IN EVERY CANINE CANDIDATE

Gracie was found as a stray in Paso Robles, CA, and taken to San Luis Obispo Animal Services Division (SLOASD), a long-time recruitment partner of SDF. Serving all of San Luis Obispo County, SLOASD boasts 20 active foster homes in addition to their 68 kennels and approximately 40 active volunteers. When Gracie arrived at their shelter, she became a favorite of those volunteers, who noted that Gracie was very friendly with people and loved to play, sometimes holding multiple balls in her mouth at once!

A 25-year volunteer with SLOASD, Ellen Perryess is experienced in assessing dogs for working potential and helped SDF recruit five candidates from SLOASD since 2010, three of whom became certified search dogs. She said, *"Volunteer Barbara Engles contacted me because of Gracie's obsessive behavior about balls. I came out and worked with Gracie, and what I saw made me believe she was a good candidate for SDF."*

Ellen contacted us, and Canine Recruitment Manager Sylvia Stoney sent her video examples of SDF's recruitment protocols for the volunteers to duplicate. Barbara and Ellen set up the assessments for Gracie with help from shelter staff, who pitched in to create a makeshift rubble pile to test Gracie's willingness to walk on unsteady terrain.

Shelter Supervisor Shannon Sinclair recalls, *"[We set up the video] in our staff multipurpose room by creating a setting of loose objects such as chairs, tables, and boxes to show that Gracie would eagerly climb over the most unstable footing to get her desired reward, her ball."*

The evaluation process was fun for all involved, but none more than Gracie herself. *"Gracie was such a champ, always ready for one more chance to find a ball or tug on a toy. For her, it was a grand game!"* Ellen says. Gracie nailed each challenge, proving her potential as a search candidate, and headed to our campus to join the search program.



While Gracie excelled in many aspects of the search dog program, her innate instinct to chase wildlife ultimately proved to be a better fit for a different career path. Trainers are confident that Gracie's exceptional energy and drive will lead her to a fulfilling role that aligns with her natural abilities, and as part of our SDF family, we are committed to helping her find it.

No matter where Gracie's journey takes her, her friends at SLOASD are there cheering her on. Thanks to the frequent updates provided by our Recruitment Team, staff and volunteers at SLOASD keep up with Gracie's progress and share the news with their community via social media. Ellen says that she and the other volunteers always look forward to the updates. *"Each update made my day! Even though Gracie ultimately became a career change dog, I know she's going to have the life she was born to live!"*

SDF's partnerships with shelters like SLOASD are critical to helping high-drive homeless dogs find their way to fulfilling lives. Says

Sylvia Stoney, *"We are so grateful for the staff and volunteers at SLOASD who are quick to alert us to potential candidates in their shelter and always eager to assist us with evaluations. We love collaborating with SLOASD because they share our passion for helping these dogs find their true purpose in life."*

Gracie is just one more example of how SDF's relationships with shelter partners pay dividends in saving lives. Ellen Perryess said it best:

*"There are few homes that would be able to manage Gracie's boundless energy and enthusiasm, so for dogs like Gracie, SDF is a lifesaver. SDF trainers are giving Gracie the skills she needs to make a meaningful difference in the world. Does it get any better than that?"*

*Below: Gracie practices agility with SDF Director of Canine Behavior and Training, Mandy Tisdale*



# CAREER CHANGE

## FROM SEARCH DOG TO SNOW DOG: RAVEN FINDS FUN AND FULFILLMENT IN THE UTAH MOUNTAINS



Photo credits: Andrew Bowersox

Raven was purchased by a family in Salt Lake City who hoped she would make a good support dog for their child, but Raven's rambunctious personality soon made it clear this was not her ideal role. Unable to handle her energy, the family placed an ad for Raven's adoption. An SDF recruiter spotted the ad—and Raven's potential.

Raven's off-the-charts drive signaled she would need a job to be happy, so perhaps disaster search was the role she was looking for. She hitched a ride to our campus with our friends at Angel Flight West. Once evaluated, Raven was enthusiastically accepted into our program, and it didn't take long for everyone on campus to fall head over heels in love with this adorable black ball of wiggly energy!

Just as quickly, Raven fell in love with her training, practically leaping for joy at every opportunity to work. Raven thrived on *learning* and *doing*, and the more she learned, the more it seemed she was *made* for disaster search. But when Raven progressed to searching on rubble, her future in disaster search became less certain.

Raven loved searching for hidden "victims" in barrels and buildings, but she was hesitant to walk on unstable ground. To overcome this issue, Raven's trainers worked to help build

her confidence through fun, low-pressure play on unstable surfaces. Although she made some progress, Raven let trainers know she would never be completely comfortable walking on rubble. Raven adored and excelled at all other aspects of her training, so our team knew she would be a fantastic candidate for search and rescue in a different discipline, such as wilderness or avalanche.

Around the same time, avalanche search and rescue handler Andrew Bowersox had begun his search for a new canine partner to join him in his work at Powder Mountain Resort in Utah. SDF alums Lady and Leo were career-changed to Powder Mountain, so when the word got out that Andrew was looking for a dog, Lady's handler, Craig, urged Andrew to contact SDF.

*"All I kept hearing was SDF! They have great dogs! You have to get a dog from SDF!"* says Andrew. When he found out Raven was available, Andrew headed to our National Training Center, where he met Raven and spent ten days participating in our Handler Training Program, working with Raven and our trainers to build a relationship with his new canine partner.

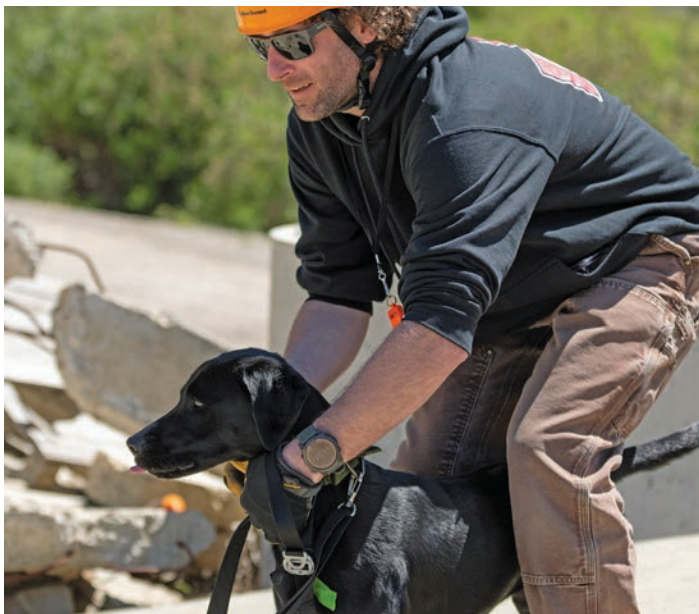
Andrew said his time at SDF opened his eyes to new ways to communicate with dogs and has helped him become a better handler. *"Going to SDF, I really learned the way dogs think. All the*



Raven joins SDF alums Lady and Leo on the Powder Mountain avalanche canine team.

info they gave me was incredibly useful, and I feel like I came away with twice what I knew.”

Back in Utah, Andrew wasted no time getting Raven out to train in her new environment. Raven immediately took to the



Raven trains with handler Andrew Bowersox.

snow and her new career, and the team is currently working to certify for on-snow work through Wasatch Backcountry Rescue. Raven already passed her obedience element, including the long stay—a five-minute wait with the handler in sight for two minutes and out of sight for three.

In the next few months, Andrew hopes to work up to their “A” Dog Certification. To pass, Raven will have to find one to three victims buried in snow that is one to two meters deep. Passing that test qualifies the team to respond to avalanche events statewide.

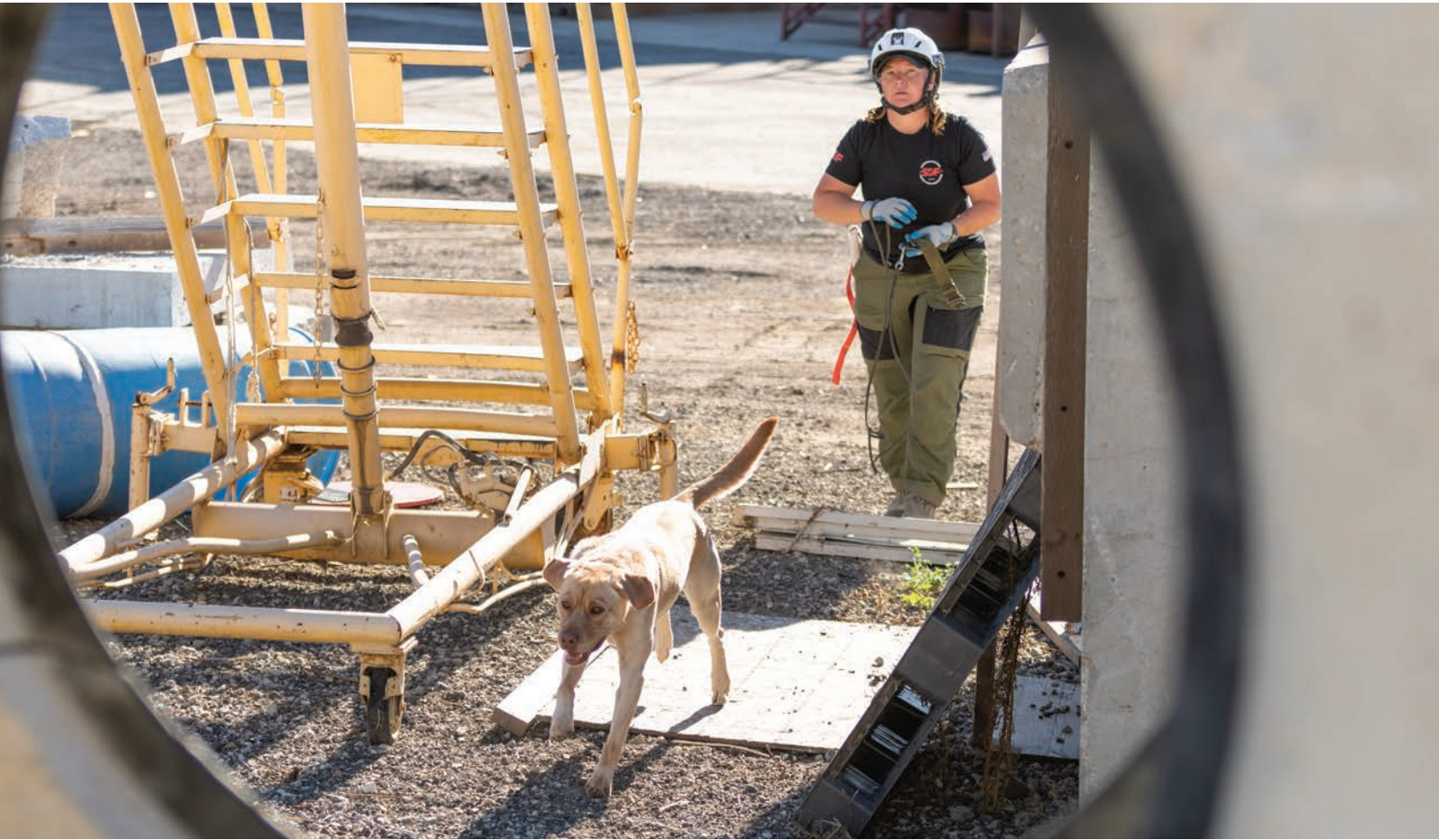
Raven is more than happy to participate in all the training it will take to reach that achievement. “Super cute, hyper, high-drive Raven is all about work!” Andrew says. “You ask her to do something, she’s not just like, ‘Yes.’ She’s like, ‘H\*\*\* yes!,” he laughs.

Reflecting on his time at SDF, Andrew tears up a bit. “Staff at SDF—they were so awesome. It was hard leaving there because everyone I interacted with was incredible. I am so grateful to have had that experience and to meet Raven.”

Career change partners like Powder Mountain Resort provide alternative pathways to success for high-drive dogs in our program who don’t pursue disaster search. We are deeply grateful for this relationship, and to Andrew for giving Raven the loving home and exciting life she so richly deserves.

# SDF'S HANDLER TRAINING PROGRAM

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN-CANINE PARTNERSHIP DESIGNED TO SAVE LIVES



*Gizmo works with Canine Trainer Julia Kopan.*

At SDF, we're proud of our commitment to excellence in canine disaster search training. Crucial to this goal is our Handler Training Program, which was carefully designed to develop specific handler skills and an understanding of canine behavior while fostering a deep bond between human and canine partners.

Unlike a one-size-fits-all approach, SDF believes in treating each dog as an individual, acknowledging their uniqueness, and honoring their distinct learning styles, preferences, and motivations. This "dog-first" philosophy prioritizes the dogs' well-being and happiness throughout the training process, ensuring each dog is trained in a way that resonates with them, making the learning process more effective and, most importantly, a joyous experience for each dog.

SDF trainers spend countless hours with canine search candidates, observing and evaluating their behavior, temperament, and learning abilities, gaining intimate knowledge of each dog's likes and dislikes, from the type of praise they thrive on to the kind of toy they prefer. This deep understanding of each canine as an individual allows trainers to provide insights to the human who will eventually become the canine's partner.

But the individualization doesn't stop with the dog. Each human handler also receives one-on-one attention from SDF



*Greta trains with Handler Arby Fields of Los Angeles County Fire (California Task Force 2).*



*Wheeler is rewarded with a game of tug with Handler Alyssa Corsa of Berkeley Fire (California Task Force 4).*

trainers. This personalized approach ensures the handler can learn to understand their dog's individual cues, body language, and motivations and apply SDF's "dog-first" principles to their specific canine partner. By helping each handler understand their dog's needs, SDF encourages a strong bond between the human and canine partners based on mutual respect, understanding, and effective communication.

Our training program does more than teach search skills; it also builds a solid foundation for a lifelong partnership. Once the canine and human teams are paired and go home together, handlers receive ongoing support from trainers and staff throughout their careers with their dogs. Whether it's a training challenge, a behavior issue, or a need for reassurance that they're on the right path, the SDF team is always available, providing resources and guidance. This continuous support helps maintain a powerful bond between the human and canine partners, ensuring they remain a cohesive and effective search and rescue team.

SDF's commitment to building strong teams benefits not just the dogs and their handlers but also has a lasting impact on the communities they serve. By prioritizing individual needs, fostering unbreakable bonds, and emphasizing a "dog-first" philosophy, SDF ensures that each canine-human team is optimally prepared when called on in times of crisis.



*Tex demonstrates his planking skills with Canine Trainer Callie Heggeness.*

# DEPLOYMENT SPOTLIGHT

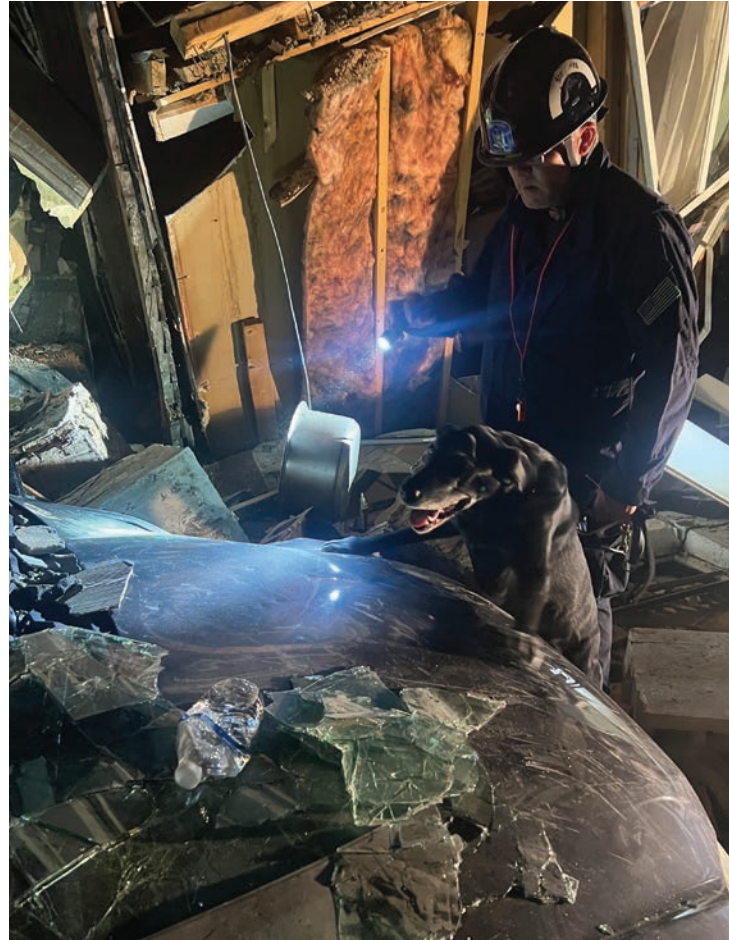
## TWO CANINE TEAMS SEARCH WRECKAGE OF SYRACUSE HOUSE EXPLOSION

New York Task Force 2 (NY-TF2) teams Adam Leckonby & Luka and Greg Gould & Keila searched for victims buried in the remains of a Syracuse home after an explosion leveled it on June 18. Firefighters encountered a heavy odor of natural gas when they arrived on the scene, and investigators initially believed the natural gas supply to one of the home's appliances may have been responsible for the explosion. Their suspicion was later confirmed when fire investigators discovered a free-flowing natural gas leak in the basement of the house. Two families were inside when the blast ripped through the home, hospitalizing twelve family members with serious injuries, eight of them children.

Handler Adam Leckonby reported that he and Search Dog Luka entered the area of highest concern first, gaining access through a second-floor bedroom window that had collapsed to ground level. The room was severely tilted, making it challenging to search. Luka finished his search and cleared the structure, and then Search Dog Keila worked the same areas to verify that it was clear of any survivors. All in all, more than 60 personnel responded to the scene, including a human remains detection dog from the New York State Police, who confirmed that, miraculously, all those inside the home when it collapsed made it out alive.

Reflecting on this deployment, Adam said, *"The drive, abilities, and nose of a working canine cannot be matched by any manmade technology. While buildings may not collapse every day, we remain vigilant and stand ready to answer the call. The speed, efficiency, and thoroughness of a canine brings peace of mind, and closure to not only the families, but that of responders as well that every effort has been made to make sure everyone has been accounted for."*

Our hearts go out to these two families, who have a long road ahead to recovering physically and emotionally from this tragic event. We're grateful to the first responders whose readiness and care resulted in no lives lost and to our canine search teams for ensuring that no family member was left behind.



Above: Keila searches alongside teammate and veteran handler Greg Gould.  
Below: Luka and Handler Adam Leckonby clear the debris pile.  
Photos credit: New York Task Force 2







Canine teams searched through debris and the wider areas around the wildfires' path.  
Photo credit: California Task Force 2



## SDF SEARCH TEAMS DEPLOY TO NEW MEXICO WILDFIRES

On June 21, 2024, SDF human remains detection search teams Nick Bartel & Six, Jon Mungia & Clifford, and Ed Ruiz & Harper from California Task Force 2 (CA-TF2), and SDF Handler Eric Darling & Mazie from California Task Force 5 (CA-TF5) traveled to New Mexico with their teammates, Celine Serrano & Prentiss, Chris Mackenzie & Mia, and Julie Purcell & Keres to assist in the aftermaths of wildfires. Their deployment came in response to a federal disaster declaration issued for parts of southern New Mexico ravaged by at least two wildfires.

Although the cause of the fires was unknown, the southwest has been extremely hot and dry for several months, creating dangerous fire conditions that worsened with high winds. Fire crews battled the blazes with heavy equipment and air drops of water and retardant, but the fires mercilessly burned through thousands of acres in record time. While intermittent rainstorms provided some relief, they also brought new dangers in the form of lightning strikes and flash floods.

Evacuation orders were issued to Ruidoso, a town of approximately 7,700 just west of the Apache reservation. The nearby community of Ruidoso Downs was also told to leave the area, and a state of emergency was declared for Lincoln County

and the Mescalero Apache Reservation. Sadly, several lives were lost, and over 1,400 structures burned, approximately half of them homes.

After nearly a week in New Mexico assisting rescue and recovery efforts, our teams completed their mission and returned home on June 27. We are incredibly grateful to all the canine teams from across the country and the other first responders who worked tirelessly throughout this disaster to ensure all community members were accounted for.

# NEW SEARCH TEAMS PAIRED

BETWEEN JANUARY AND JUNE 2024, WE WELCOMED NINE NEW TEAMS COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE IN CRISIS RESPONSE. THESE DEDICATED INDIVIDUALS HAVE UNDERGONE INTENSIVE TRAINING TO BUILD THE SKILLS AND TEAMWORK NECESSARY TO RESPOND TO DISASTERS WHEREVER THEY OCCUR. WE LOOK FORWARD TO THEIR CONTINUED GROWTH AS PARTNERS AS THEY POSITIVELY IMPACT THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THESE RECENTLY PAIRED PARTNERS AND NEWEST MEMBERS OF SDF'S ROSTER:



**BRANDON ANDERSEN & TIMBER**

Sacramento Metro Fire  
California Task Force 7  
Recruited from Tooele City Animal Shelter  
Sponsors: David and Barbara Barnhart,  
Linda Heizer Seaman, Anonymous Donor



**IVAN ARREDONDO & GIZMO**

San Diego Fire-Rescue  
California Task Force 8  
Recruited from Homeward Bound Golden Retriever  
Rescue & Sanctuary  
Sponsors: Farmers Insurance®, Anonymous Donor



**JOSE ARTEAGA & SID**

San Miguel Fire  
California Task Force 8  
Recruited from Montana Belgian Malinois and  
Dutch Shepherd Rescue  
Sponsor: Joal Catt Miller



**ALYSSA CORSA & WHEELER**

Berkeley Fire  
California Task Force 4  
Recruited from Dogs for Better Lives  
Sponsors: Ann Cooluris, Nahikian Family Foundation,  
Anonymous Donor



**TRACY DARLING & ROKA**

California Regional Task Force 7  
Recruited from a previous home  
Sponsors: Stephen and Kathleen Davis



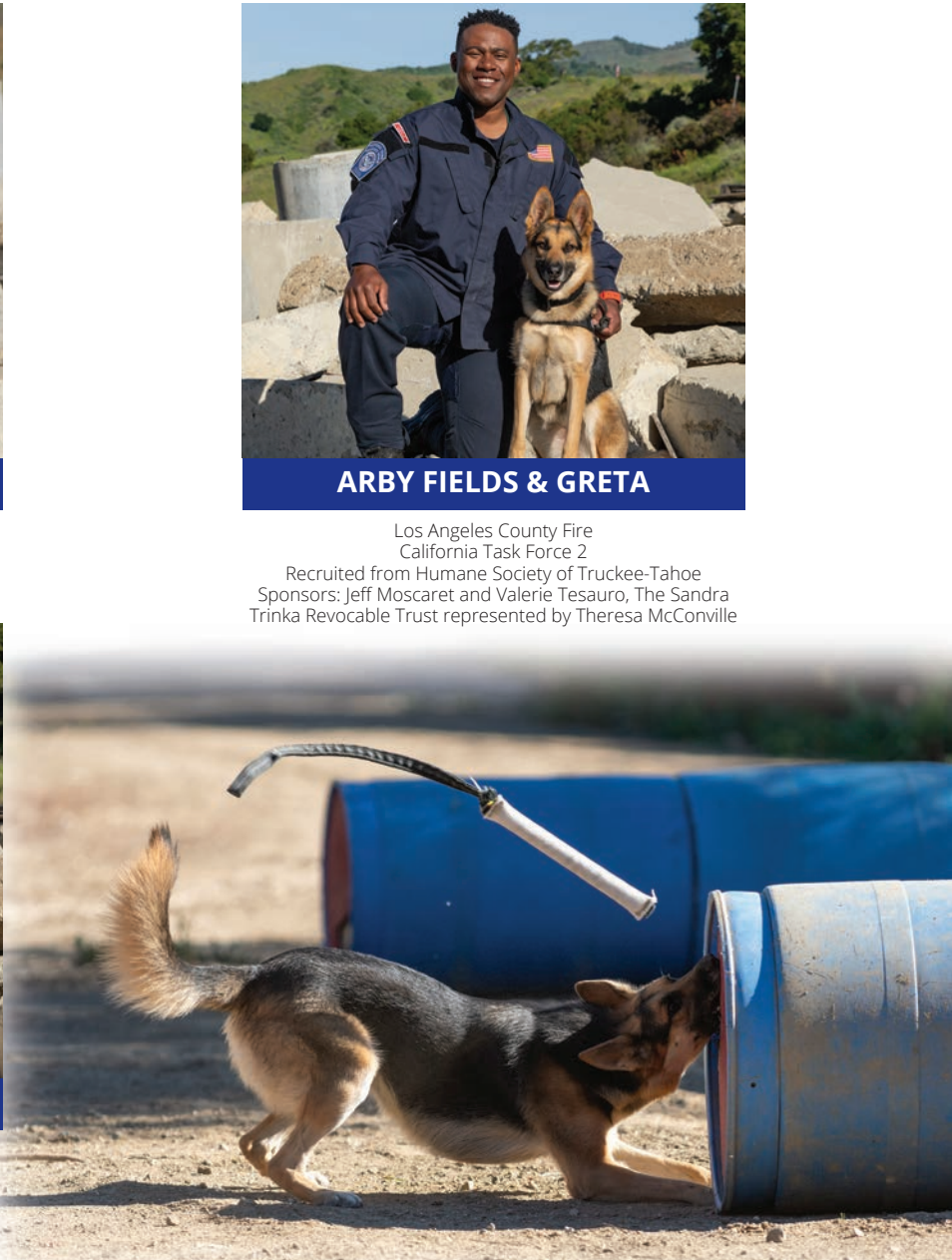
**ARBY FIELDS & GRETA**

Los Angeles County Fire  
California Task Force 2  
Recruited from Humane Society of Truckee-Tahoe  
Sponsors: Jeff Moscarel and Valerie Tesauro, The Sandra  
Trinka Revocable Trust represented by Theresa McConville



**ALMA LOWRY & LENNIE**

San Diego Fire-Rescue  
California Task Force 8  
Recruited from Tooele City Animal Shelter  
Sponsor: The Joel and Dena Gambord Family



**TRINITY MAURER & GOLDIE**

Virginia Task Force 2  
Recruited from a previous home  
Sponsor: Julie Croker



**ALEXIS MILLER & HAWTHORNE**

Los Angeles County Fire  
California Task Force 2  
Donated by Kaiser K9, Inc.  
Sponsor: Pat Snyder

# CERTIFICATIONS

TO MAINTAIN READINESS FOR DEPLOYMENT, EACH SEARCH TEAM MUST UNDERGO EVALUATIONS EVERY THREE YEARS. THESE ASSESSMENTS MEASURE THEIR MASTERY OF CRITICAL SKILLS AND THEIR ABILITY TO WORK SEAMLESSLY TOGETHER. WE ARE IMMENSELY PROUD OF THESE TEAMS FOR THEIR DEDICATION TO THEIR TRAINING, THEIR PARTNERS, AND HELPING THOSE IN NEED.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FOLLOWING TEAMS ON THEIR RECENT CERTIFICATIONS:



**BRANDON BUDD & OTTER**

Certification: March 2024  
 Sacramento City Fire  
 California Task Force 7  
 Recruited from a previous home  
 Sponsor: Maria Hindenes and  
 the Hindenes Animal Trust



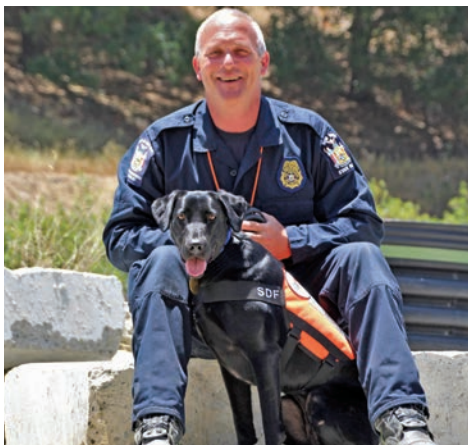
**PATRICK EASTON & LINUS**

Certification: March 2024  
 Sacramento City Fire  
 California Task Force 7  
 Recruited from Domesti-PUPs  
 Sponsors: Nanci Denney Bergin and Nicole Lallande,  
 Anonymous Donor



**ERIK FALKENSTROM & LESLIE**

Re-certification: March 2024  
 San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District  
 California Task Force 4  
 Donated by Kaiser K9, Inc.  
 Sponsor: Arc Aspicio



**BRIAN GIRARD & KEILA**

Re-certification: May 2024  
 NYS DHSES Office of Fire Prevention & Control  
 New York Task Force 2  
 Recruited from Brightside Animal Shelter  
 Sponsor: The DeMartini Family



**CAREY JENKINS & NATE**

Certification: February 2024  
 Lincoln Fire-Rescue  
 Nebraska Task Force 1  
 Recruited from Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA  
 Sponsors: Kathleen and Stephen Davis



**PHIL KLEINHEINZ & SASSAFRAS**

Certification: March 2024  
 San Francisco Fire  
 California Task Force 3  
 Donated by Kaiser K9, Inc.  
 Sponsor: The Joel and Dena Gambord Family



**ADAM LECKONBY & LUKA**

Re-certification: May 2024  
NYS DHSES Office of Fire Prevention & Control  
New York Task Force 2  
Recruited from City of Tracy Animal Services  
Sponsor: The Joel and Dena Gambord Family



**KIEGON LIST & CHLOE**

Re-certification: March 2024  
Sacramento Metro Fire  
California Task Force 7  
Recruited from Cheyenne Animal Shelter  
Sponsors: Nahikian Family Foundation,  
Anonymous Donor



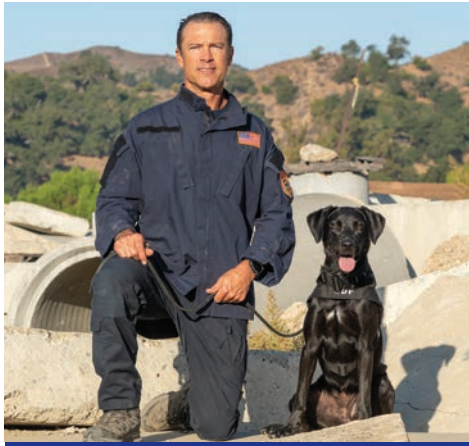
**JAMES MCCANDLESS & MAC**

Re-certification: March 2024  
Sacramento Metro Fire  
California Task Force 7  
Donated by Chris Ronsisvalle  
Sponsor: Pat Snyder  
Named in Honor of Teresa MacPherson



**BRIAN MEDLEY & NAVY**

Re-certification: March 2024  
San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District  
California Task Force 4  
Sponsor: The Joel and Dena Gambord Family  
Named to honor the United States Navy's Seabees  
who completed construction work on our campus



**DEREK MOREE & ROMA**

Certification: March 2024  
Los Angeles County Fire  
California Task Force 2  
Recruited from Southern California Cat Adoption Tails  
Sponsor: Meg Kasdan



**BROOK ROWLEY & ECHO**

Re-certification: May 2024  
NYS DHSES Office of Fire Prevention & Control  
New York Task Force 2  
Recruited from Mohawk Hudson Humane Society  
Sponsor: Arc Aspicio  
Named by Miller Hill Elementary in New York



**SHEILA STERN & HUGO**

Certification: June 2024  
Nebraska Task Force 1  
Donated by Kaiser K9, Inc.  
Sponsors: Pat Snyder, Anonymous Donor



**KEVIN TATRO & DEMPSEY**

Certification: February 2024  
Nebraska Task Force 1  
Recruited from Sioux Falls Area Humane Society  
and South Dakota Canine Center  
Sponsor: The Joel and Dena Gambord Family



**ANTHONY VASTA & BONUS**

Re-certification: March 2024  
Contra Costa County Fire Protection District  
California Task Force 4  
Recruited from Dogs for Better Lives  
Sponsor: Ann Cooluris

# RETIREMENTS

WE HONOR THESE EXTRAORDINARY TEAMS WITH HEARTFELT GRATITUDE AS THEY CONCLUDE THEIR CAREERS IN DISASTER SEARCH. THESE INCREDIBLE CANINES HAVE SERVED WITH DISTINCTION, AND WE WISH THEM ENDLESS TENNIS BALLS AND BELLY RUBS AS THEY EMBARK ON WELL-DESERVED RETIREMENTS.



**ALLIE**

**Years of Service: 2015-2024**

Handler: Tom Carney  
South San Francisco Fire  
California Task Force 3

Recruited from a previous home  
Sponsors: Pamela Hill, Carol Marengo, The Joel and Dena Gambord Family, Marith Levers



**CLANCY**

**Years of Service: 2015-2024**

Handler: Jake Armendariz  
Los Angeles County Fire  
California Task Force 2

Recruited from a previous home  
Sponsors: The Joel and Dena Gambord Family,  
Pat Snyder  
Named by Cecilia O'Flynn and Kathleen Kennedy



**EVA**

**Years of Service: 2016-2024**

Handler: Manny Sampang  
Los Angeles County Fire  
California Task Force 2

Recruited from a previous home  
Sponsors: Otilia and Emma Diaz



**SCOUT**

**Years of Service: 2014-2024**

Handler: Derek Chaky  
Carrollton Fire Rescue  
Texas Task Force 1 & 2

Recruited from James River Humane Society  
and South Dakota Canine Center  
Sponsors: Scott Florance, Valerie Roddy,  
and Patrick Shields of Quinn Emanuel LLP



# RAINBOW BRIDGE

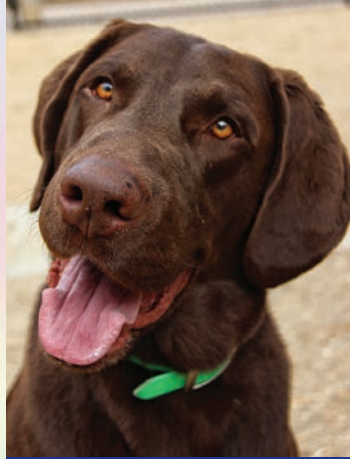
WHILE A LIFETIME WITH OUR BELOVED CANINE PARTNERS IS FAR TOO SHORT, WE CHERISH EVERY MOMENT SHARED. THESE EXTRAORDINARY DOGS WILL FOREVER BE REMEMBERED ON OUR CANINE MEMORIAL WALL. THEIR YEARS OF SELFLESS SERVICE, THE COUNTLESS LIVES THEY TOUCHED, AND THE IMMEASURABLE LOVE THEY BROUGHT TO OUR LIVES WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN.



**BILLY**

**January 30, 2012 – January 26, 2024**

Handler: Patti Krafft  
Dallas Fire Rescue  
Texas Task Force 1 & 2  
Recruited from Humane Society  
of the South Platte Valley and  
South Dakota Canine Center  
Sponsors: Elinor Plumer, Julie Brandau  
Community Service Memorial Project  
Named in memory of William M. Sparuk



**BLAKE**

**November 1, 2014 – May 24, 2024**

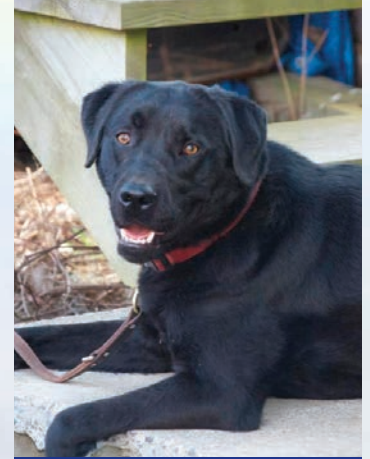
Handler: Michael Brice  
San Diego Fire-Rescue  
California Task Force 8  
Recruited from Jackson County  
Animal Services  
Sponsor: Red Oak Foundation



**CAJUN**

**January 15, 2013 – July 5, 2024**

Handler: Josh Flores  
Los Angeles County Fire  
California Task Force 2  
Recruited from a previous home



**DAX**

**August 30, 2010 – May 28, 2024**

Handler: Greg Gould  
NYS DHSES Office of Fire Prevention  
& Control  
New York Task Force 2  
Recruited from Guide Dogs of America  
Puppy Raiser: Christina Guz  
Sponsor: Planet Dog Foundation



**JUSTICE**

**September 8, 2009 – March 12, 2024**

Handler: Jeff Leon  
Tulsa Fire  
Oklahoma Task Force 1  
Recruited from Dos Palos Animal Control  
Sponsors: Arc Aspicio, Julie Brandau  
Community Service Memorial Project



**MAGNUM**

**January 10, 2009 – April 15, 2024**

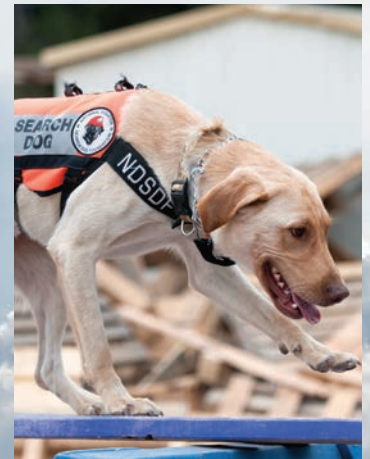
Handler: Vincent Stoops  
Tulsa Fire  
Oklahoma Task Force 1  
Recruited from Shasta County Sheriff  
Animal Regulation



**ROXY**

**March 23, 2010 – April 13, 2024**

Handler: Cynthia Sato  
Los Angeles Fire  
California Task Force 1  
Recruited from Sacramento SPCA  
and South Dakota Canine Center  
Sponsor: The Joel and Dena Gambord  
Family



**ROYCE**

**January 1, 2009 – January 28, 2024**

Handler: Judy Zinn  
Oklahoma Task Force 1  
Recruited from Santa Barbara County  
Animal Services  
Sponsors: Janet and Greg Van Huisen,  
Marilyn Benande and Jackie Emerson



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888.459.4376  
[www.searchdogfoundation.org](http://www.searchdogfoundation.org)



**Thank you  
for being *Part of the Search!***