

New search dog Ace is showing promise

Written by Chris Lee



Sheriff's Deputy Michael Grant and his partner Ace have been out and about getting to know one another. Ace is the newest addition to the department and is used as a search dog.

—Enterprise photo

Ace, the newest member of Phillips County Sheriff's Office has been out and about learning the tricks of the trade.

Deputy Michael Grant acts as the primary handler and said Ace has done about 75 searches so far. Those mainly include trial searches during his training.

Ace has only done two actual searches which included an abandoned vehicle and possible stolen items. Neither search turned up anything, according to Grant.

The deputy said Ace is currently trained on marijuana. When he is fully trained, Ace will be trained on cocaine, methamphetamine and heroine.

Grant said it took nearly two months to get a license through the DEA to obtain drugs to help train the 1-year-old German Shepherd.

Ace conducts 6-10 searches every day. They consist of searches where Grant will take the drugs and plant them in a car or building, among other places, and give Ace the "seek" command. Ace will use an aggressive alert which includes scratching and pawing to show he has found something.

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Grant said it is pretty crazy to watch Ace work. The marijuana he is using is over 10 years old and has no scent to a human. This is normal as the other drugs such as cocaine which will be used on down the road also don't have a scent to humans.

Grant mentioned so far everything seems to be pointing in the right direction. "He'll go right to it," Grant said. "It only takes him less than about three minutes to find it," he added.

Ace gets to play with his tennis ball once he has found something. It acts as his reward for finding the drugs. Grant said he gives Ace a lot of praise with yelling and shouting to show him he has done something right.

Grant said Ace is good with building searches as well. He has used the sheriff's office and Ace will start outside in the car. There are two doors to go through just to get into the offices. Ace knows instantly when he enters a room if the drugs are present or not because the scent trail will break off if the drugs haven't gone through a door.

Although the abandoned car Ace searched recently didn't result in anything, Grant said it was good for him to see how Ace acted when there weren't any drugs present.

Grant said it will be a long process as they didn't purchase a trained dog and opted to train Ace themselves. "It takes a lot out of you." When they started, Ace would do something right one day and act like he didn't know anything about it the next day. Grant added the everyday training is necessary so Ace won't lose any progress.

Ace isn't a bite dog and will be used strictly for searches. Grant said he barks a lot but that is because he just wants to play with people. Grant added Ace is pretty protective of the vehicle and his 20x20 ft. kennel.

Grant said he hopes to take Ace to the schools for education purposes when he gets a little more comfortable around people. Ace did attend the track meet in Haxtun a while back and kids had the opportunity to play with him a little, Grant said.

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Grant hopes Ace will be certified sometime in September. Although the certification isn't mandatory, Grant said it looks better if the dog is certified.

Nearly \$3,200 was raised to get the program off the ground. \$2,500 came from the Heginbotham Trust, a citizen donation of \$200 and the City of Holyoke donation of \$400. Holyoke will continue to donate \$400 each year the dog is used to help with costs.

Grant said there is currently only enough money for the bare minimum. He purchased the leash and collar as well as food and cleaning supplies. Donations are welcomed by the Sheriff's Office to help with costs associated with Ace.