

Hilltop Times

Local EOD trainer teaches old dogs some new tricks

Wednesday, October 29, 2008

By Lee Anne Hensley

Hilltop Times staff

Local dog trainer, Roger Miller, does his best to keep the community safe and alleviate potential demand for Hill Air Force Base security forces. He accomplishes this task mostly with the help of abandoned dogs.

Miller has been in the dog rescue business since 1983 and has professionally trained dogs to hunt.

"We would get mostly hunting dogs that the owners could not keep or want," said Miller.

"We would also board dogs at the kennel and the people would never come back."

After the events of Sept. 11, 2001, Miller felt compelled to take his training experience to the next level in order to meet the increased demand within the community for explosive and narcotics detection dogs. Miller completed the Utah Police Officer Standard Training as a K-9 handler and has certified his own dog, Abbey, in explosive detection. Miller had rescued the Golden Retriever and Labrador mix from the pound and she is now certified on more than 20 explosive odors, as well as guns and casings. She has logged more than 40 explosive ordnance detection calls.

After his success with Abbey, Miller trained two other rescued dogs for explosive ordnance and narcotics detection, both of whom he sold to Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, for their Transportation Security Administration Program.

"I've sold them two dogs that both came from the Brigham City Pound, Talon and Maggie. Both were Labradors," Miller explained. "Since then we have sold other started dogs to police departments and private security companies."

With the assistance of active citizens like Miller, along with community law enforcement agencies adding canine detection programs to match the increasing demand for such services, Hill AFB has not felt the impact of the increased demand.

"Being near a large city with so many explosives detection dogs in the area, we have not seen an increase in searches off the installation, but we have seen an increase in deployments," said Tech. Sgt. Joseph Throgmorton, 75th Security Forces Squadron Military Working Dog kennel master.

Having fewer obligations to complete detection services in the community allows the Hill AFB military working dogs to be available to do detection work that only they are certified for. "We have the only certified dogs (through the Department of Defense) in the area who are allowed to work with the Secret Service if any dignitaries come through the area," said Throgmorton.

Throgmorton says that Department of Defense installations located in smaller areas experience higher community demand since there are not many EOD certified canine trainers in the smaller communities.

"When we were in North Dakota, we were always at the airport, and we were always at the schools, because at the time we were the only bomb dogs in the state," Throgmorton said. The Hill AFB MWD unit regularly engages with the local detection dog trainers, however. All local certified EOD trainers attend a consolidated canine training program together once a month and the Hill AFB MWD unit will provide supplemental support for detection for "a large facility, such as a stadium," Throgmorton said.

In 2004, Miller participated in a search with the Hill AFB MWD unit in response to a bomb threat at Weber High School in Pleasant View.

"Weber High is one of the larger schools in Utah and there were only a few dogs available at the time," Miller said. "The building was successfully cleared without an incident."

Miller is now focusing on his current nonprofit project, the Animal Concepts Foundation. It is a nonprofit rescue facility where rescued dogs are evaluated and placed with suitable long-term owners who will encourage the dog's inherent capabilities, Miller said. One dog rebounding from one shelter to another was rescued by the foundation and now works as an explosive detection and patrol K-9 for Weber State University. Miller also helped WSU obtain a grant to fund the purchase of their K-9s.

Although the nonprofit organization charges a fee for the certified detection dogs, the tax-deductible charges cover the minimal cost of training. "All of the dogs have had some training and have been tested for a specific task," said Miller. "All of the dogs are current on their vaccinations, too."

The foundation is still in its start-up phase and Miller is actively seeking assistance of any kind. "We have applied for a grant and are currently seeking tax-deductible donations as well as sponsors," he said. "We are looking for responsible adult volunteers to help care for, train and process the dogs that are up for adoption. And we can always use treats, blankets and towels."

To learn more about the foundation, visit the Web site at www.animalconceptsfoundation.com.