

# The VISITOR CENTER MONTHLY

*Telling the story of Lead's history, present, and future*

## Working to Recover Loved Ones:

### Cadaver Working Dogs Spend Hours Training, Searching for Critical Missions

-Wendy Pitlick

When it comes to search and rescue missions, Kathy Dolan's dogs, Belgian Malinois Cerin and Pogo are rock stars who can work in the most difficult weather conditions, on some of the roughest terrain, and for several hours at a time to help bring people's loved ones home.

Dolan and the group WolfPack Working Dogs frequently work with law enforcement on search and rescue and recovery efforts in the Black Hills. The group spends thousands of hours training their dogs who have the highly specialized skill set, and between the five of them they have at least 100 years of training experience. Many of the dogs are "mission ready," so that when law enforcement calls them to do a rescue or recovery effort, they can leave as soon as they're needed.

"By the time we get the call, typically they've done a lot of searching in the immediate area," Kathy said, adding that only law enforcement agencies can call dogs to a search. "When you show up to a search you are at a command station. You're not in the search area. You get assigned an area that you're going to search, and our job is to say whether that person is in that area. In the Black Hills, we'll be given typically about 40 acres because of the terrain. If it's a little flatter, you might go up to 160 acres. You're given the area and you're told you have to come back with your probability of detection for that area and how sure you are that person is not in that area. You want to be above 80 percent sure that you didn't miss something."

But many factors can determine whether the dogs are able to pick up a scent. Wind changes can keep a dog from picking up the scent of someone who is just 10 feet away. Severe weather, rough terrain, and the type of person who is missing can also factor into a dog's ability to rescue or recover someone. That's why, Kathy said, many search and rescue missions involve searching the same places multiple times.

"If a dog is only ever trained on a known adult, that's the only thing you can trust that dog to find is a known adult," Kathy said, adding that her group is always looking for volunteers who are willing to help train the dogs. "It's huge if we have people who have children and will let us practice with them. Also, the elderly are important for training. Both of those do not smell like adults. Children haven't developed scent glands yet, and they're lighter, so they don't leave the same path. Elderly smell different. They generally don't sweat anymore and they have a different odor to them. So if a dog has never trained on a child, we can't guarantee that it can find a child."

Helping the dogs train is a very easy and safe process, that Kathy said closely resembles a large game of hide-and-seek. It can be a fun exercise for volunteers, and the value in training for the dogs to possibly be able to save a life in the future is a major contribution to search and rescue efforts. "We can set it up very, very safely," she said. "Most of us use GPS. Typically if we are sending out a young child we will send them out with the dog's collars, so we know exactly where they're at all the time. We typically have them flanked by at least one, possibly two adults that are close enough where they can see them, but not too close so as to interfere with the dog's work. We would love to see more kids and elderly come out because most searches do involve children and older people." CONT ON FLIP



## NOTES



### GIFT SHOP HIGHLIGHT

Chip Away Gold is one of our newest products! We're finding new and fun kids toys and activities that spotlight mining and our golden history! Chip away at the soft matter and find gemstones and even sometimes real gold! Kit includes chunk of "rock", toy chisel, magnifier and hammer. \$6 and selling quick!

**MAKER MARKET** - Sat 6/19 from 9:30-3:30. Featuring homemade goods, vintage and antique items as well as various art items.

**BIKE RODEO** - Sat 6/19 for kids 5-12. Get a helmet a tshirt and learn about safe biking! Register by calling City 584-1401 before 6/2. SLHVC parking lot!

## CONT FROM FRONT

Helping with training is just one way the community can lend their efforts to make a difference in search and rescue. But Kathy said the opportunities for volunteerism are abundant. From taking FEMA classes that teach volunteers about the chain of command and important aspects of search and rescue, to a young man's recent effort to build the group a scent wheel that can be used in training the dogs — a gift that saved the group thousands of dollars in training equipment.

"You do not have to spend hours tromping around in the woods," Kathy said. "I always joke and say 'can you make a sandwich? Most of the time if we're going on a search, we're getting up at 4 a.m., getting the dog ready, getting our gear ready and traveling to who knows where. Many times I don't take the time to pack myself more than trail mix. The dog probably has better food than we do. So there are a lot of ways to help."

In fact, stressing the importance of overall volunteerism is one of the reasons Kathy said the WolfPack Working Dogs group agreed to present the most recent Science Rocks workshop on Cadaver Working Dogs, held May 27 at the Sanford Lab Homestake Visitor's Center. There is great interest in the working dogs, Kathy said, and so the presentation focused on the science of how the dogs work, including a short demonstration. But members of the WolfPack Working Dogs also encouraged the audience to get involved and volunteer their efforts within their community. In fact, Kathy and the group knows all about volunteerism, having spent thousands of hours giving their time to serve with their working dogs.

"It's pretty much a second full time job," Kathy said of the hours she puts into training and answering calls for dog searches.

But Kathy does it because she loves to help, and she loves putting her dogs to work. Belgian Malinois, the breed of Kathy's dogs, are bred to be working dogs. They are at their best when they're on a mission.

"The average working dog is not your pet," Kathy said. "They have a huge work ethic. They love their toys. They love their balls. They are also bred and trained not to want to go play with other dogs, because if you're on a search team and there are 10 dogs out there, you want them ignoring each other."

"I think people would be amazed," Kathy said about the effectiveness of the working dogs at a search site. "When you're looking at the capability of a dog's nose, it's parts per trillion. It's not unusual for my dogs to pick up from even a mile away. But working it out to there with the challenges of the terrain and the wind changes in the Black Hills, sometimes you can't work from A to B. You just have to keep figuring out where you need to go next."

// deSales Writing Service

### Sanford Lab Homestake Visitor Center

501(c)3 - (605)584-3110 - Hours 9am-5pm every day

**Sierra Ward**, Executive Director

sierra@sanfordlabhomestake.org

**Leigha Patterson**, Assistant Director

leigha@sanfordlabhomestake.org

**Mission** To tell the story of Lead, to welcome and inform the visitors to our town and do so in a financially sustainable way.

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