



Canine Program

Sgt. Hackler and tracking dog #26 is assigned to the Jackie Brannon Correctional Center.

by Richard Price, Program Manager
The Oklahoma Department of Corrections (ODOC) currently uses dogs for the detection of contraband and the tracking of escaping offenders. The mission of the program is to reduce the amount of contraband introduced

into the facility, discourage escapes by reducing apprehension time and/or enhancing the apprehension rate for departmental escapes. Additionally the program strives to increase cooperation between ODOC and local law enforcement agencies by providing

support when requested.

The two breeds of dogs used by the department to conduct the narcotic detection mission are German Shepherds and Belgian Malinois. These breeds' natural curiosity, great sense of smell, and high play drive make them ideally suited

to fulfill the role as narcotic detector dogs. The department currently has 20 narcotic detector dogs assigned to various correctional centers throughout the state. The dog teams are used routinely to conduct searches of offender areas and visitors. The dogs are rewarded for their



Pictured above: (left) Sgt. Bouziden and Narcotic Detector Dog Marco (BJCC) in 2009 after winning the National Police Canine Association Competition. Marco passed away in June 2012; (middle) Lexi, a retired narcotic detector dog from James Crabtree Correctional Center enjoying life in her new home; and (right) Sgt. Harvey and retired narcotic detector dog Bret from the Oklahoma State Reformatory.

hard work with play and affection from their assigned handler.

The department currently has seven facilities which host tracking dogs. Due to their extraordinarily keen sense of smell, combined with a strong and tenacious tracking instinct, the bloodhound and the coonhound are both well suited for the trailing of escaping offenders. Depending on the terrain and the situation, the tracking dogs are either used individually and worked on leash or released in packs of three or four dogs and followed by

the handlers using global positioning tracking collars.

The department has recently expanded the tracking dog program to include tracking dogs at Bill Johnson Correctional Center (BJCC) and Northeast Oklahoma Correctional Center (NEOCC). The tracking dogs located at these facilities were bred at Jackie Brannon Correctional Center. The puppies were trained by Sgt. Tony Hawking, Sgt. Tomas Munoz, and Sgt. Blake Hackler. The expansion of the tracking dog program was designed to

ensure that tracking dogs can quickly and efficiently be deployed in response to an escape anywhere in the state.

Along with the expansion of the tracking dog program, the department is planning the development of a centralized canine training facility. The facility will provide both initial training and ongoing sustainment training for both the handlers and their assigned canines. Canine teams working in the corrections field face unique challenges, not encountered by their police counterparts on the street. To

meet these challenges, the department currently conducts limited breeding of the tracking dogs and is planning to start and maintain a limited breeding program to produce narcotic detector dogs that possess higher drives, more stamina, and are better socialized. This will allow the canine teams to better assist the facilities in the reduction of contraband by producing a dog that will work harder for a longer period of time. The dogs will be better socialized to meet the canine programs mission of reducing contraband brought into our facilities.

James Crabtree Correctional Center (JCCC)

By Sgt. Jackie Ekman

I have been the canine handler for JCCC for six years. I feel truly blessed to have had this opportunity. It has been an awesome learning and growing experience for me.

A canine handler's duties are interacting, working and training with the canine. These tasks alone are extremely time consuming and are the most vital parts of the job. What I have learned over the years however is, for a canine and handler, assistance from and communication with other employees are the keys to success. No part of the Department of Corrections will run well if it is not a part of a team and the canine program is no different. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all employees for their willingness to share information and to the officers who isolate and contain search areas, and ultimately search alert areas. Without your diligent searches the canine could not be a productive tool.

I have had the privilege of working with two canine partners. Lexi (picture on opposite page, top middle), retired in June of 2013 after a severe illness, which required a hospital stay in the Oklahoma State University vet hospital. Lexi was on IV fluids for several days and in need of around-the-clock care for an extended period of time after she was sent home. I am pleased to report she is now happy, healthy and living with me and my family, where she is loved by all.

I have been working with canine Yukon for a year now. He does a good job. I could not be happier with him. Our bond is solid and we work well together. I do have to say, however, I was a bit nervous when we first met. The best way to describe what I was introduced to, was some sort of a distant cousin to the Tasmanian Devil! Thankfully over time he has calmed down. He even lays down once in a while now! Ha Ha.

On a more serious note, our duties consist of working a medium yard that

currently houses 954 offenders and a minimum yard where 222 offenders are housed. We have PPWP Crews who work in two other towns as well as our own here in Helena. These areas must be checked randomly. Visiting days are always a concern as unfortunately we have visitors who attempt to introduce contraband. The farm areas and surrounding areas of our facility need searched on a regular basis as they have increasingly become drop sites for contraband over the years. We also assist with shake downs at other facilities.



Sgt. Jackie Ekman with canine Yukon.

Every October, We visit area schools for Red Ribbon Week. We have a coloring contest. Students are given pages with a picture of a dog similar to Yukon on them to color. The 1st 2nd and 3rd place winners receive certificates and all students get a trading card or some other