



Photos by Dan Goggin

ABOVE: A Des Plaines police officer works his dog in various phases of attack training at the TOPS K-9 Center in Grayslake. The center plays host to some of the top police dogs in northern Illinois. BELOW: A Lake County Sheriff's officer takes her trained drug dog through the halls of ACHS. The dogs are routinely used in an effort to keep schools free from drugs and other dangerous substances.

Area K-9 teams work doggone hard



By Dan Goggin

Police dogs searched lockers throughout Antioch Community High School, for illegal substances on Friday, March 10. The police dogs used are trained at local kennel, TOPS K-9 Center.

If a department is in need of dogs to do a search at a school, they will put out a notice to police departments, and K-9 officers from those departments can respond to the notice.

In order for a dog from a separate station to perform with a different department,

they are required to have written permission.

Alex Rothacker, owner of TOPS, trains the dogs and stated that the dogs can be taught to do a variety of jobs, with scent tracking being the most difficult.

"Tracking takes the longest to teach. That is the only one where they have to stay on the scent for a long period of time," said Rothacker.

Dogs at TOPS are trained to do area searches, like those conducted at ACHS.

The dogs are trained for tracking, handler protection, cadaver searches, and identification of explosives.

Most of the dogs are trained to do each of these tasks, but some do are not used as often as others.

"Tracking cadavers may not be used a lot but it is the most important job a dog can do," said Rothacker.

Shannon McMillon of TOPS K-9 Center indicated that Cadaver searches are very similar to area searches.

"The dogs are given a scent to start with in an area search, as well as in a cadaver search," said McMillon.

TOPS also trains dogs in officer protection, also called bite work. The dogs are taught to follow

their officers orders regarding disabling a suspect. If the police officer is in danger, the animal will protect them. Mike Mellenthin, Des Plaines police officer, and his dog Bravo have been working together for two and a half years.

"Bravo is my second dog, and I've been with the K-9 unit for ten years," said Mellenthin. "He's your partner and your best friend."

For the Officer, when their dog is successful it is a rewarding experience.

"I love doing searches with my dog, it is rewarding when they do well," said Mellenthin.

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