



There are only
half as many
active search-and-
rescue teams as
needed in the U.S.



Search and rescue
dogs undergo vigorous
training to make sure
they have the right stuff.

To The Rescue

If you find yourself or a loved one in trouble, emergency response and search and rescue dogs can play a critical role in getting you the help you need. **BY DIANA KELLY LEVEY**

It was early evening in January 2017 when Canine Disaster team member Cynthia Sato got a call that she—and her dog, Roxy—were needed. The two raced to meet up with the Los Angeles Fire Department after they received an alert that a hillside in the Hollywood Hills of California had given way, creating a mudslide that impacted homes. Roxy went to work, searching the debris and mud to make sure no one was trapped or left behind. Luckily, all was clear—and the two went home to a good night's sleep. (See Roxy's story, page 86.)

When weather or another disaster wrecks havoc, emergency workers aren't the only response teams employed. Search-and-rescue dogs like Roxy are a critical part of first response, often deployed with teams from the National Disaster Search Dog Foundation (SDF).

FINDING THE RIGHT STUFF

SDF turns rescued dogs into rescuers. The organization finds dogs in shelters, adopts them and trains them to find and rescue humans.

"We look for a dog that has a lot of 'toy drive,'" explains Denise Sanders, SDF's director of communications. Recruiting starts with an SDF trainer or recruiter's walking past dogs in a shelter, swinging a toy to see how the dogs react. "If a dog comes running up to the fence, doing everything it can to get to that toy, and wants to engage or be out and play, that's a pretty good sign that we

to have that toy so badly, they won't stop hunting for it," says Sanders. That same desire will be crucial for the search dog that's sniffing for a human in rubble. If the trainer suspects the dog has what it takes to be a search-and-rescue dog, the dog is then adopted from the shelter and brought to SDF's national training center in Santa Paula, California, for a comprehensive training program.

No technology can match a dog's speed and accuracy in finding people trapped in the wreckage of a disaster.

need to evaluate that dog a little bit further," says Sanders.

From there, a trainer will take the dog to an open play area and conduct an evaluation process, including six steps of increasing difficulty, to test how driven the dog is. "The dogs we want have an insatiable need to get that toy—they never give up, they're going to check every nook and cranny. They want

"We're essentially picking the elite canine athletes that will be going out to save my family and your family," adds Sanders.

If it turns out the dogs aren't the best candidates for search and rescue once the evaluation continues, they are often placed in other service areas, including drugs or explosives detection and even bedbug detection.

TEAMING UP

Once the dogs are matched with trainers and graduate from SDF, they're ready for deployment. When a hurricane, tornado, earthquake or other disaster strikes, dogs are brought in to comb through homes where people may have tried to ride out the storm. They'll also check collapsed structures and look for survivors who may be unconscious or can't call out for help. "They're there to [work with the teams] and make sure that nobody gets left behind," says Sanders.

Dogs can cover even the most challenging terrain more quickly than humans, and their keen sense of smell can identify people buried alive—especially those who are unconscious and unresponsive—faster than any piece of equipment. "In a situation like Hurricane Katrina, there were miles of

devastated homes and no way a human or team of humans could cover that ground efficiently," notes Sanders. "[Search teams] covered that terrain in a short amount of time while being certain that there was no one left there alive."

SDF dogs don't work just in the U.S. Several teams were sent to Nepal after the 2015 earthquake and to Haiti in 2010. "They searched buildings that fell down, and...had a lot of rubble to deal with, a lot of sand, a lot of different components from what they're used to, and they did a fantastic job," says Sanders of the Nepal quake.

"The search dogs are a great way of making the process more efficient and safer for everyone," she adds. "They help make sure that, in that window we have to find survivors after a disaster, we make the best use of our time and resources." 🐾

RESCUE FACTS

\$50,000

Cost to train each dog, including recruitment, medical evaluations, food, care and training time before being partnered with a handler

22 years

Length of time the SDF has been recruiting dogs

250

Dogs trained at SDF since inception

REAL-LIFE HEROES

Meet the Rescue Teams



Noah

The 9-year-old yellow Lab was picked up in Fresno, California, when he was 2. A trainer who found him in a shelter noticed he had a lot of energy and plenty of excitement for toys; further evaluation also revealed a desire to hunt, strong footing skills and more. Soon afterward, Noah met his Nebraska-based trainer and owner, Mark Schroeder, and was brought home to be a part of FEMA's Urban Search and Rescue Nebraska Task Force 1, where he continues to be based today.



Lilah

In 2011, year-old black Lab Lilah was picked up as a stray by a shelter in Sacramento, California.

After an evaluation, she was paired up with Marshia Hall, a Florida-based Task Force 4 veteran handler. Lilah's training was soon put to the test when a young boy was reported missing.

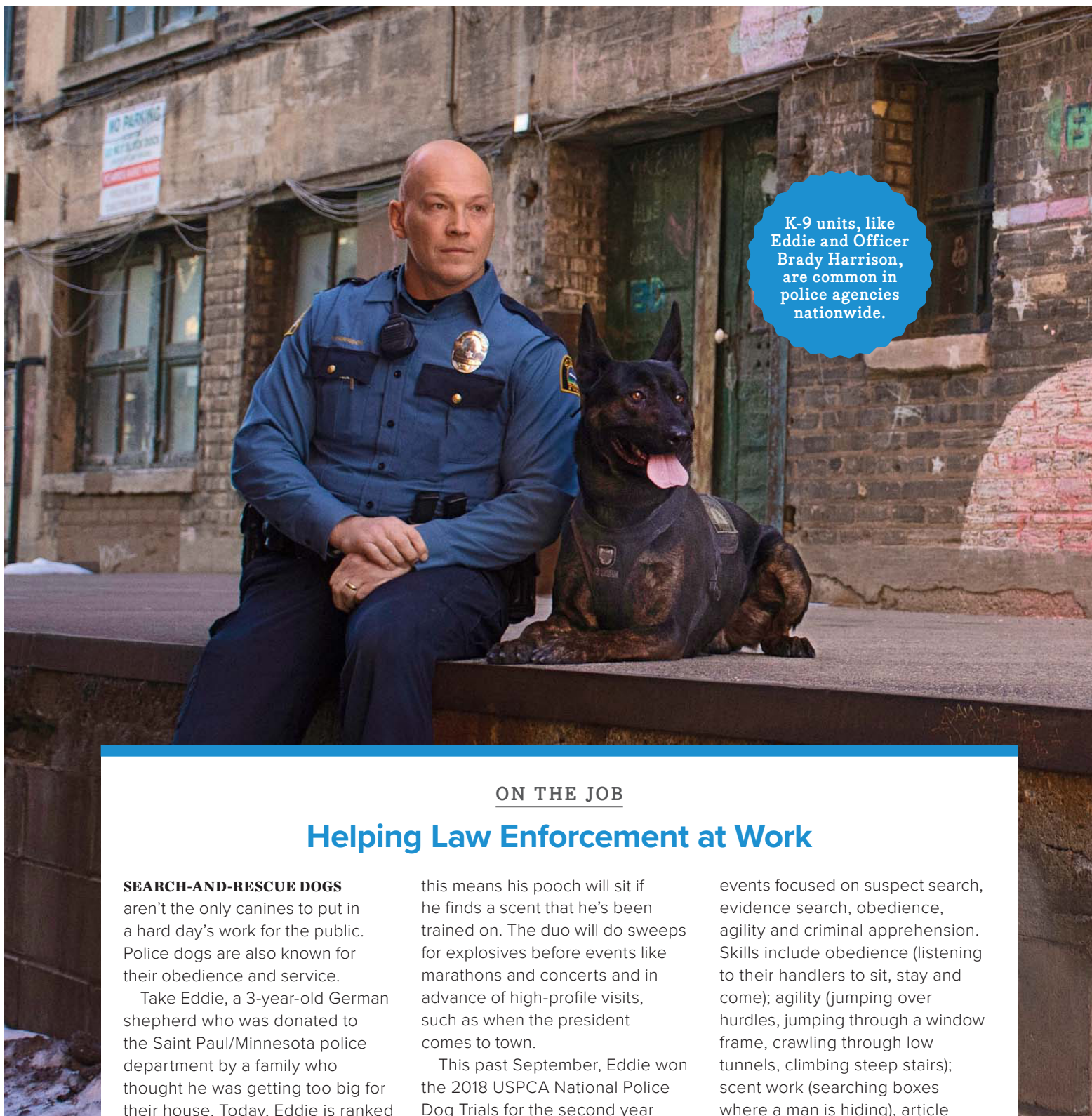
Since then, the duo have been tasked with several search efforts, including those associated with Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Florence, working with teams to ensure no one is left behind.



Roxy

Roxy was a year old when she was brought to the Sacramento SPCA by her owner in 2012, who said the dog had too much energy. Roxy was soon sent to the SDF, where she was partnered with Cynthia Sato, a veteran of the U.S. Forest Service.

The duo passed an exam that allows them to deploy wherever disaster strikes in the U.S. Their work has included helping to rescue occupants in L.A.'s Hollywood Hills and searching for survivors in mudslides.



K-9 units, like Eddie and Officer Brady Harrison, are common in police agencies nationwide.

ON THE JOB

Helping Law Enforcement at Work

SEARCH-AND-RESCUE DOGS

aren't the only canines to put in a hard day's work for the public. Police dogs are also known for their obedience and service.

Take Eddie, a 3-year-old German shepherd who was donated to the Saint Paul/Minnesota police department by a family who thought he was getting too big for their house. Today, Eddie is ranked as the top dog by the United States Police Canine Association (USPCA), a nationwide group that certifies many of the top-performing canines in the country working with law enforcement.

Eddie spends his days as an explosives detection dog and a patrol dog. His handler, Patrol Canine Officer Brady Harrison of Minnesota's Saint Paul Police Department Canine Unit, explains

this means his pooch will sit if he finds a scent that he's been trained on. The duo will do sweeps for explosives before events like marathons and concerts and in advance of high-profile visits, such as when the president comes to town.

This past September, Eddie won the 2018 USPCA National Police Dog Trials for the second year in row. The championship was held in Huntsville, Alabama, with 140 of the nation's best dogs competing to see who would be crowned the national champion.

"We believe that stronger competition brings about better performance," explains David "Lou" Ferland, Ph.D., executive director of the USPCA.

Over the course of a week, the dogs and their trainers compete in

events focused on suspect search, evidence search, obedience, agility and criminal apprehension. Skills include obedience (listening to their handlers to sit, stay and come); agility (jumping over hurdles, jumping through a window frame, crawling through low tunnels, climbing steep stairs); scent work (searching boxes where a man is hiding), article searching (looking for a shotgun shell and bringing it to the trainer) and apprehension work (the dogs are judged on how well they come back when called after running after a decoy, and, separately, how well they apprehend a suspect by biting a sleeve).

Eddie's big prize for winning the competition? A few cheeseburgers, which he happily consumed—minus the buns.