



Upcoming events

Northern Regional Training
Weekend

23 – 24 January
Auckland

Operational Handler
Weekend

6 – 7 February
Christchurch

National Training Weekend

5 – 7 March
Auckland



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Merry Christmas

The last few weeks have produced some momentous occasions for the Search Dog Association. In October we had our first ever Operational Assessment, which replaces CREP.

The list below gives the country's operational dogs. Well done to those who re-gained certification, to Nikki Smith for gaining Operational Level, and Linda Pike

held in December. Thanks to Janelle and Brenda for running the great weekend, reported later.

The Association is always seeking new potential handlers. You would have read of the Palmerston North recruitment drive in the previous newsletter. There was another in Auckland last month, read more later in this newsletter.

| Handler | Canine | City | Certification Date | Certification Level |
|----------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Nikki Smith | Vader | Auckland | 18 October 2009 | Operational |
| Brenda Woolley | Easy | Christchurch | 18 October 2009 | Operational |
| Linda Pike | Que | Christchurch | 18 October 2009 | Advanced |
| Sara Rad | Sasha | Auckland | 18 October 2009 | Advanced |
| Graham Joseph | Tala | Christchurch | 18 October 2009 | Advanced |
| Janelle Mackie | Cairo | Christchurch | 18 October 2009 | Advanced |
| Brenda Woolley | Boss | Christchurch | 18 October 2009 | Advanced |
| Tania Spence | Mocha | Auckland | 3 May 2009 | Operational |
| Brenda Woolley | Keepa | Christchurch | 3 May 2009 | Operational |

for moving to Advanced Level. This was a splendid effort by everyone, and the first time a 100% pass rate has been achieved. We are really appreciative to all who helped make this happen, with special thanks to our Vet, Jenny Waters and Evaluators Sgt Paul George and Sgt Chris Best.

The other "first" for the Association was the Foundation Training Weekend

There are also articles on valuing older pets and a very funny article about dogs and cats.

As the year comes to a close, I wish you a very Merry Christmas and hope that you are able to enjoy summer weather and fun times with friends and family.

Fay Deam SDA Coordinator



Operational Assessment



Northern Recruitment

This year the Management Committee have decided on targeting Volunteer Fire Fighters for recruitment. At the end of September a recruitment weekend was held in Palmerston North. Recruitment and Dog Assessments were held in Auckland in November. The Association is always looking for new potential handlers and dogs. We have also been receiving enquiries through the revamped website. To those who have recently joined the SDA. Welcome. Fay Deam

100% pass rate...

The Operational Assessment weekend held in October had 2 significant features. It was the first assessment to our new Operational Assessment standard, and we had a 100% pass rate. These two are obviously linked and represent another feature of the new pathway to operational level status. When Nikki and Vader were the first team to qualify to this new standard they had already shown via the National Training Programme process that they were performing at operational level. They could also focus on searching as the elements had been signed off at Progress Check #6. The search was a lot more realistic with Nikki and Vader having a rubble pile 4 x the size with an unknown number of people (within a range) and the presence of distractions- a much more realistic test. Well

done to Nikki and Vader who performed very well.

In addition to this new operational team we were able to conduct 2 "rounds" of Operational Advanced assessments. On Saturday Graham and Tala, Brenda and Easy, Sara and Sasha and Janelle and Cairo each did 3 piles, meaning of a total of 12 rubble searches- a busy day. On Sunday Brenda and Boss recertified and Linda and Que certified advanced for the first time.

A special big thanks to the subjects, Jenny (vet), Paul and Chris (NZ Police Dog Section) and Kilo (chief subject sorter), and the rest of the CHCH team and TF 2 for all the assistance- it really was a big team effort.

Janelle Mackie

Foundation Training Weekend - Christchurch

11 December 09

The introductory evening was an easygoing but very informative evening for all new and old handlers. The course outlines kicked off the night after pizza. Learning some of the history about USAR Dog in NZ started the older members stories of the early days and how far the dog team has come.

An informative session learning about recent deployments started lots of discussions, which did not stop all weekend. This was great to see and learn from and the openness to share details and information is a great asset to the handlers and the association.

12 December 09

Day 2 began at 9am back at Woolston fire station training area. We covered basic training principles, living with a working dog, the basics of scent theory, the role of the most important person is the helper and reward systems.

After demos from Brenda and Easy, it was time for the puppies to hit the training ground. It was a good opportunity for the dogs to mix and to see if our training so far would hold up around so many new dogs and handlers.

After a welcome break at the Task force 2 BBQ, our attention turned to the new Christchurch training box. It will be great to see the dogs working this one out next year.

Back to the class room for some more theory before the excellent vet's talk which covered a number of issues that we might encounter and how best to deal with them. I

think, I can say from all that attended that it was great to have a truthful and informative session.

13 December 09

On the final day, we all met down at the Christchurch pound's agility yard. After a great demo from Easy. It was time again to have the puppies out for a bit of one on one training. During this session a number of points were picked up. After a well-earned cup of tea it was off to learn directions before lunch.

After a quick change of site to Frews on Johns road it was time to start searching. All the dogs were getting a bit hot, however all completed their tasks successfully. It was great training for the dogs to have a chance to find new people in a new location.

After a constructive debrief of the weekend by Brenda and Janelle. This was the first foundation weekend held by NZ USAR Dog Association. I think I can say for all that attended that a lot was learned this weekend by both new handlers and old and the foundation course will be an asset to the association in moving forward.

I would like to thank Brenda & Janelle for such a great weekend and for their time. Now it is time to put it all into practice.

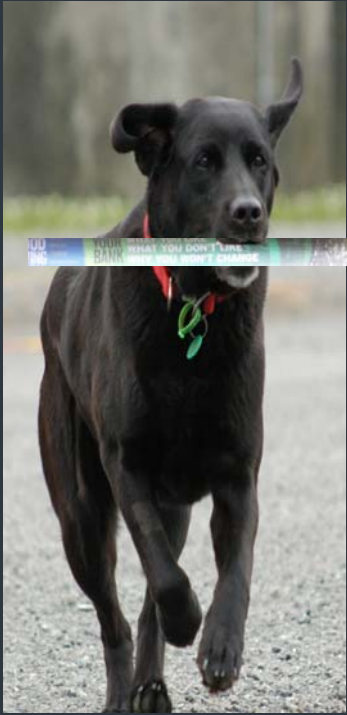
Craig Cuthbertson

Foundation Training Weekend - Christchurch



Dogs in the Media

Clever canine to the rescue



SEARCH AND RESCUE: Vader is a big fan of owner Nikki Smith's makeshift agility course in Paerata, one of his training grounds.

By **FRANCES McADAM**

His name is Vader, as in Darth Vader, and the 3½-year-old Huntaway Cross is Franklin's only qualified NZ Urban Search and Rescue dog.

It took two years for Vader, a dog who looked like he needed a job according to owner and USAR dog handler Nikki Smith of Paerata, to become a fully qualified disaster search dog.

"As a pup he was always searching for things," says Nikki.

Nikki joined the Northern Canine Search Specialist group after a friend commented on Vader's potential to be a search dog.

Vader had to complete a national training programme with the New Zealand USAR Search Dog Association, involving assessment of his agility, obedience, balance, human-friendly nature and general search and rescue skills.

The Northern Canine Group trained Vader at rubble sites all over Auckland, as well as Franklin's A&P showgrounds, Waiuku Forest and Franklin Archery Club.

There was only one hiccup along the way and that was Vader's inability to bark.

"He was quiet as a mouse," says Nikki.

Barking is an important skill for search and rescue dogs and Nikki had to bribe Vader for a week with his favourite snacks to get any sound out of him.

Vader finally graduated on October 18 and Nikki was "over the moon" about it.

Vader is now an operational level USAR dog able to search single level building disaster sites.

In 12 months' time, he will re-apply for the qualification and Nikki is hoping he will graduate to advanced operational level, able to search more complicated building sites with distractions.

There are only nine USAR dogs in New Zealand and it takes a dog with special skills to complete this kind of training.

"One dog is not enough if we have a natural disaster," says Nikki.

Six dogs are based in Christchurch, two in Auckland and Vader in Franklin.

There are, however, two dogs training in Franklin and USAR Search Dog Association President Brendon Irwin hopes another four or five dogs will be qualified in New Zealand by next year.

It was great to see this article about Nikki and Vader in the Franklin Times. (Used with Permission). Editors note, the "levels" in the article refer to Operational or Advanced Certification rather than building levels as written.

The Joy of Old Pets

The world's oldest dog died the other day. Chanel was 21, which translates to 147 dog-years. It made me think, everyone loves cute puppies and kittens, for good reasons - but I always have a soft spot too for pets at the other end of their lives. I love meeting an old, grizzled dog when we're out walking our own dogs, which are mere striplings at eight and 14 months of age.

The old dogs have usually lost all the puppy-like characteristics, some of which are a bit annoying and certainly not fitting to dignified elders of the canine world: aggression, rebellion, leaping too much, barking too much, hassling you or other people or dogs.

What's left in the elderly dog is a gentleness and a love for all the simple pleasures: a stately walk in fresh air, a lie-down in the sun, a tasty treat, a cuddle with a human companion. And their tails still thump in pleasure.

There's a classic country song that celebrates this, called Old Dogs, Children and Watermelon Wine. It's about an

elderly man who passes on the wisdom of his apparently sad life:

*Ain't but three things in this world
that's worth a solitary dime*

*But old dogs and children and
watermelon wine*

*Old dogs care about you even when
you make mistakes*

Isn't that true?

I noticed that Chanel, the world's oldest dog, was a wire-haired dachshund. That's the same breed as my eight-month-old pup, Connor. He's a lolling teenager in dog terms right now, though he's already showing a taste for sunbathing, and his loyalty to his pack is rock-solid.

Hard to believe that, if he lives as long as Chanel, he'll still be with us in 2029 (if man is still alive). He and I will be old men together.

Have you had a pet that lived to a great age? A friend of mine had two cats, one aged 19 and the other 18. They didn't do much, spending most of their lives



Chanel



Pierre

sleeping in various unlikely but comfortable places. But a visitor's lap was a special treat for them.

One died not long after our last visit, victim of what I suppose is a not uncommon fate for old animals: being unintentionally run over in his owner's driveway.

My dear departed destiny-cat, Pierre, blossomed in the last two of his 18 years. For some reason his eyes brightened, his Russian blue fur thickened and he just seemed more lively than in his earlier middle-aged years. He even managed to catch a couple of mice and a bird at the age of 16, long after we'd thought his hunting abilities had vanished with age. It was an Indian summer, bursting out well into winter.

It was a short decline for Pierre. He went from robust life to complete bodily failure in just a couple of months.

Notice to Cats and Dogs

The following was found posted very low on a refrigerator door:

Dear Dogs and Cats:

The dishes with the paw prints are yours and contain your food. The other dishes are mine and contain my food. Placing a paw print in the middle of my plate and food does not stake a claim for it becoming your food and dish, nor do I find that aesthetically pleasing in the slightest.

The stairway was not designed by NASCAR and is not a racetrack. Racing me to the bottom is not the object. Tripping me doesn't help because I fall faster than you can run.

I cannot buy anything bigger than a king sized bed. I am very sorry about this. Do not think I will continue sleeping on the couch to ensure your comfort. Dogs and cats can actually curl up in a ball when they sleep. It is not necessary to sleep perpendicular to each other, stretched out to the fullest extent possible. I also know that sticking tails straight out and having tongues hanging out on the other end to maximize space is nothing but sarcasm.

For the last time, there is no secret exit from the bathroom! If, by some miracle, I beat you there and manage to get the door shut, it is not necessary to claw, whine, meow, try to turn the knob or get your paw under the edge in an attempt to open the door. I must exit through the same door I entered. Also, I have been using the bathroom for years - canine/feline attendance is not required. The proper order for kissing is: Kiss me first, then go smell the other dog or cat's butt. I cannot stress this enough.

Yet three days before he had his last visit to the vet, the spark of life ignited in him. On a Friday night we brought home two young rabbits from the petshop and installed them in a cage. Pierre went nuts, couldn't take his eyes off them, made that quivering noise he used to make when looking at a bird outside the window.

It was a last assertion of his feline instincts - they never really left him until his last moments.

Eighteen years, 21 years - they are long lives for pets. But when it's your own pet, it still doesn't seem long enough, does it?

Web link: www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/blogs/four-legs-good/2826109/The-joy-of-old-pets

Finally, in fairness, dear pets, I have posted the following message on the front door:

TO ALL NON-PET OWNERS WHO VISIT AND LIKE TO COMPLAIN ABOUT OUR PETS:

1. They live here. You don't.
2. If you don't want their hair on your clothes, stay off the furniture. That's why they call it 'fur'-niture.
3. I like my pets a lot better than I like most people.
4. To you, they are animals. To me, they are adopted sons/daughters who are short, hairy, walk on all fours and don't speak clearly.

Remember, dogs and cats are better than kids because they:

1. Eat less,
2. Don't ask for money all the time,
3. Are easier to train,
4. Normally come when called,
5. Never ask to drive the car,
6. Don't hang out with drug-using people;
7. Don't smoke or drink,
8. Don't want to wear your clothes,
9. Don't have to buy the latest fashions,
10. Don't need a gazillion dollars for college and
11. If they get pregnant, you can sell their children



Web links

http://dogs.thefuntimesguide.com/2008/12/dog_christmas.php
This great photo came from the above link "Dog Dangers at Christmas – Plus other holiday tips for dog owners. Check it out."

