

Crisis response canines train in Sisters

By **Jodi Schneider McNamee**
Correspondent

Dogs can help people get through a crisis.

Sue Dolezal of Sisters Eagle Airport, her husband Gary, and their dogs Isaac and Foster, are specially trained and certified with National Crisis Response Canines to do just that. Last October 2, they were deployed to Roseburg to attend the Roseburg candlelight vigil just one day after the UCC shooting.

National Crisis Response Canines held a rigorous three-day training and evaluation in Sisters last weekend to recertify teams. Participants arrived from Florida, Alaska, Michigan, Washington and Oregon.

National provides certification for crisis response canine teams who demonstrate competency in working in the complex physical and emotional environments of disaster.

Dogs helping people.

A crisis can be a home fire, domestic violence, child abuse, tragic death, school shooting, missing elder or a crime. A disaster such as wildfires, terrorism or floods can affect an enormous number of people psychologically.

Crisis response canines are specially trained in psychological first aid and certified to work effectively to deal with a person that feels overwhelmed by personal crisis. When someone is hurting, crisis response teams help replace the feeling of fear, anxiety and hopelessness

with feelings of being safe, cared for, and capable. The crisis response team works alongside community agencies such as the Red Cross that provide support and assistance.

Sue and Gary Dolezal's dogs are certified crisis response canines, and they used the training last weekend to cross-train their dogs between each other.

"You never know which dog is going to be with whom, so it was something we needed to do," Dolezal said.

Twelve-year-old Henry was certified for crisis response in 2008, and is now retired after eight years of service.

In 2004 Dolezal and her husband got involved with Deschutes County Search and Rescue (SAR).

"I backed off when I started working at the airport, plus I wanted to work more with our dog Henry to get him certified with the crisis response team. Gary has been with SAR for over 10 years and is the logistics chief," said Dolezal.

While dogs in both crisis response and animal-assisted therapy essentially provide the same service — bringing a sense of comfort and safety — the biggest difference is the environment in which they work. Crisis response canines receive advanced training to work in the complex physical environments of disasters and to safely interact with strangers experiencing intense emotions in the aftermath of crisis.

National President Connie Jantzen flew in from Florida to help with instruction and evaluation along with Barbara Geno, a National instructor from Michigan.

"With crisis response work, there's nothing normal," Jantzen says. "You don't know when you're going, the dogs are working in unfamiliar surroundings and the surroundings may be damaged. The dogs have to be able to understand those intense emotions and bring them back to a feeling of calm."

Jantzen's German shepherd, Lady, was the catalyst for her involvement with crisis response canines.

"Lady is now retired from the crisis response team after being of service for about seven years," Jantzen said. "She was a rescue along with her sister, Koda. They were abandoned. The family moved and left them behind in the garage for about three months. I adopted both of them, and Lady was the one that had the affiliation with people, she's been amazing."

"That's what we are looking for in the individual dog, one that has a specific temperament, a dog that is drawn to people and want(s) to be of service to them. The canine needs to be clear-headed and calm when people are in crisis."

Jantzen emphasizes that situations don't need to be disasters or crises in order for

the dogs to respond. They'll work with at-risk families or crime victims.

"There's crisis everywhere, whether it's a natural disaster, man-made disaster, or maybe just the death of a loved one," she said.

"Our approach to crisis canine work is to be involved with the community, at the community level. Of course we respond to big disasters, but there are so many things going on every day in our own communities where canines can be of service. We have the trainings in the communities so people can understand where their local resources are and where their local needs are so they can match up those resources with those needs in times of crisis and disaster."

Sisters has a tremendous resource within its community. If something major happened the local crisis response canine team would come in, and then all of the national teams would be deployed here to help the community cope.

On Saturday morning as part of the physical training, the crisis response canine team consisting of five dogs and their handlers, along with evaluators, were invited to show up at the Sisters training ground, where Sisters-Camp Sherman Fire District and Cloverdale Rural Fire Protection District train.

Captain Michael Valoppi was on hand to assist with the



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE
Sue Dolezal and Foster.

crisis response canine team.

Two firefighters had on self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) packs, ready to interact with the dogs.

"We want the dogs to be exposed to all the sights and sounds and smells of the firefighters in their turnout gear," said Jantzen. "Because of their masks and respirators, they don't look or smell human anymore. We want to familiarize the dogs to the firefighters, so they understand that under that gear they are still people and they still need to work with them during disaster."

"We are building their confidence before we increase exposure to anything they may or may not be comfortable with during a disaster," added Geno.

For more information about National Crisis Response Canines, visit www.crisisresponsecanines.org.

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