



Shelley Reecher, acting as agitator, and a Safe Run volunteer train dogs to attack aggressors only when the runner commands them to do so.

CASC
TITLE

SAFE RUN

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Reecher sets a letter from Germany in the "out-of-the-country pile," then asks which pile the Kansas letter should go in. Settling on the Midwest pile, she excuses herself to answer the phone that has been ringing off the hook.

An outpouring of letters from people across the nation who support her service has flooded Reecher's mailbox following a recent article on her program in *Glamour* magazine. While being interviewed, she frantically tries to organize and file all of the letters and answer the incessant phone calls.

Reecher started Project Safe Run in 1981 and has been running the non-profit service out of Lane County ever since. Although she started with only a few dogs, Safe Run's popularity has skyrocketed, with chapter houses all over the West coast, Canada and Alaska.

Safe Run is a service that rents trained protection dogs to women who want to run or walk without fear of being attacked. It is the only service of its kind in the nation.

"These are not attack dogs," Reecher said. "We don't even know the word 'attack' here. It's really non-violent. It's only when people are being violent that the dogs respond with aggression."

Reecher owns 36 canines that she personally trained. Every Saturday, Reecher and volunteers train private and Safe Run dogs at Civic Stadium. The fees she receives from training privately-owned dogs help to fund Safe Run.

This is no ordinary dog-training session, however. Reecher and the volunteers stress the importance of the runner's commands. The only time a dog will attack is if its runner commands it to; the dog will listen only to the runner.

"It's very unique how we work with the dogs," Reecher said. "We train them to attack only in self-defense, and that's it."

During training sessions, the dogs learn to listen only to the runner by practicing in realistic situations. Two trainers called "agitators" wearing protective pads antagonize the canines. The owners of the dogs tell them to "go for it," and only then does the dog charge for the agitator.

"It's frightening," said agitator and University student Dan Druliner. "Learning to communicate with dogs is fascinating — the way they stand, their body language. They communicate with you if you know how to listen."

"It's frightening because you look into their eyes when they are about to attack, and you know they are saying, 'You're toast, dude!'"

The Safe Run dogs are boarded in various "chapter houses" in the county. Volunteers board up to two dogs at their residence and, for \$25 a month, women can pick them up at their convenience at the closest chapter house.

Student Andrea Anderson is a chapter house volunteer and houses a Doberman pinscher named Sam. She said Sam is used primarily by three or four runners, including herself, and one of the women comes bright and early every day at 6 a.m.

"I'll get up and get Sam ready for his run and then go back to sleep for an hour before the runner comes back with Sam again," Anderson said. "It's a great service, and it works."

The convenience and security of having a running companion who will run at the runner's pace and distance and who will also protect them if necessary, makes this service desirable to many.

"Without dogs, I always felt the need to run during the day and with a male," law student Andrea Blohm said. "With the Safe Run dogs, I can run anytime I want, anywhere I want, and I can go by myself."

"It's a wonderful organization," she said. "I feel safe with the dogs because they are friendly, but I also know that the dog will go for someone who is about to attack me."

Reecher said the number of Safe Run volunteers contribute greatly to the program's success and survival. From agitators who train the dogs to chapter house volunteers to people who work on the business end, they are all a part of what makes Safe Run, she said. Nobody, including Reecher, receives a paycheck from Safe Run.

"I couldn't imagine Safe Run being a 9-to-5 endeavor," Reecher said. "It takes all of the volunteers, and their motivation for doing this is they like to feel they are needed. It's the personal satisfaction."



The owner of a German shepherd points out the agitator before releasing his dog.

Another aspect of Safe Run is education. When training personal dogs, Reecher also talks to the owners about rape awareness.

"All the training in the world isn't going to help them unless they are aware of the dangers that exist," she said.

Druliner said before he started volunteering for Safe Run, he took for granted that he is able to walk or run at night without being afraid, not thinking that women are unable to.

"It's a real bummer that women cannot walk or run alone at night," he said. "It's a real sad statement about our society, but to deny that would be crazy."

In the more than 9,000 runs thus far, there has never been an attack on anyone who uses the service in its 11-year history.

State zoning regulations may push Safe Run out

By Colleen Pohlig
Emerald Reporter

Project Safe Run, the nationally known dog-training operation, may be forced to move its main headquarters elsewhere unless county commissioners come through with a plan to overturn state zoning restrictions.

After listening at a Tuesday work session to testimonies of people who said the dogs provide them with needed protection, county commissioners agreed to seek changes in the state zoning rules that prevent Safe Run from building a boarding/training facility in the county.

For the past two years, Safe Run founder/director Shelley Reecher has tried unsuccessfully to build a facility but has faced a thick wall of zoning restrictions.

"Overall, the meeting was really positive," Reecher said. "What's going to make a difference now to Safe Run is public support — people writing letters to Congress, people saying, 'Look, this is important to me. I may not be a runner but the safety of women is important to me.'"

Reecher currently leases space at Civic Stadium in Eugene to train private and Safe Run dogs, but says the space for a facility is desperately needed to accompany the growing demand.

Reecher said she receives many calls a day from people wanting to start chapter houses in other states, but she has had to decline them because there aren't enough dogs

due to lack of boarding space.

Reecher also said she receives calls for donations of dogs, either from private families or from humane societies, but she can't take them because there is no facility to board them all.

Last year, county commissioners had approved her proposal for a facility in Dexter. However, The Land Use Board of Appeals and Oregon Court of Appeals later ruled that state zoning rules prohibit dog-training facilities on land that is meant for agricultural use.

Faced with the possibility of losing a nationally recognized business in the county, commissioners agreed to do their best to keep Safe Run in the area.

County commissioner Jerry Rust said he will wage a "full-court press" to create an exception for the service dogs. He will propose to Salem to make an exception in this case, as the state does for racing greyhounds that are raised on rural lands.

"Oregon's land-use system, which is 15 years old, still has some kinks in it," Rust said. "Counties don't have discretion over resource lands."

Reecher said she has had other offers for her headquarters to be in Washington state and she can't wait around for too much longer.

"My first goal is to keep Safe Run here, but I'm not sure how long too long is," Reecher said. "If I see lip-service going on here — just a lot of talk and no action — then we'll leave."

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