

K-9

agency spotlight

The Oakland County (MI) Sheriff's Office K-9 Unit

BY SGT. JOSEPH LAMBOURN



■ **Left:** Oakland County Sheriff's officers and service dogs (*front, left to right*): Sergeant Joseph Lambourn, Deputy Keith Christie and K-9 Kaydo, Deputy Chris Topacio and K-9 Teddy, Sheriff Michael J. Bouchard, Deputy David Curtis and K-9 Finn, Deputy Scott Reynolds and K-9 Toby, Deputy Gary Murray and K-9 Sulli, Deputy Sherry Locher and Rocko; (*back, left to right*): Deputy Thomas Kangas and K-9 Blaze, Deputy Michael Richardson and K-9 Boss, Deputy Lonnie Mullins and K-9 Boomer, Deputy Michael Garrison and K-9 Bodi, Deputy Sherry Locher and K-9 Kaiser, Deputy Rodney White and K-9 Kelo, Deputy Travis Dick and K-9 Coy, and Deputy David Roddy and K-9 Rudy.

OAKLAND COUNTY IS THE second most populous county in Michigan, and its technology-based economy is one of the largest producers of engineering and related occupations in the United States. The county seat is Pontiac, which is part of the Detroit metropolitan area. Automotive manufacturers General Motors, DaimlerChrysler, and Ford all have operations within Oakland County. The county's 910 square miles include 450 inland lakes that total 35 square miles of water. It has a population of 1.2 million residents.

The Oakland County Sheriff's Office has 1,200 employees, including more than 850 sworn deputies and 106 active reserve deputies. The Sheriff's Office services 278,000 residents through police service contracts in 15 different communities. The office has 12 substations plus a Parks Unit, a Marine Unit, a multijurisdictional Narcotics Unit, a Computer Crimes Unit, an Auto-Theft Unit, a Fugitive Apprehension Unit, an Arson Unit, a Crime-Suppression Task Force, a state-of-the-art Forensics Crime Lab, a Special Response Team (SWAT), and the state's second-largest K-9 Unit. Special equipment includes a mobile command center, a state-of-the-art surveillance van, a self-contained SWAT truck that will accommodate 20

deputies at one time, two helicopters, an armored car, and an M-113 tank.

The K-9 Unit

The K-9 Unit currently has 14 teams and may soon expand to 16. All of the dogs are German Shepherds from Czechoslovakia, Germany, and Belgium, and they include one fire investigation dog, two bomb dogs, and 11 multipurpose canines.

fast facts

The 2006 statistics for the Oakland County Sheriff's Office K-9 Unit include

- Deployments: 815
- Assists: 293
- Searches: 1081
- Tracks: 245
- Arrests: 178
- Narcotics recovered: 50,000 tabs of Ecstasy, 723 lbs. of marijuana
- Cash recovered: \$1.37 million

Several dogs have been added to the K-9 Unit through monetary donations from organizations such as Milk-Bone, Pet Supplies Plus, Kroger Company, and Farm Bureau Insurance. Other dogs have been purchased using drug-forfeiture dollars, and five of the 14 canines were contracted by and paid for by the local municipalities in which they serve via the Sheriff's contract.

The Unit has one of the few dogs trained for arson detection in Michigan: K-9 Blaze. "The arson dog can locate areas where accelerants are used, and since we do a large number of arson investigations, it made sense to add that capability to the team," Sheriff Michael Bouchard says. "Any fire department in the county that has a questionable fire can request a team from our Arson Investigations Unit." K-9 Blaze has responded to as many as 75 requests for accelerant searches within a six-month period.

In a spirit of cooperation with the Oakland County School District, K-9 teams also conduct school searches for narcotics. Typically, a school principal or superintendent calls to request a search. The Sheriff's Office then notifies and coordinates with the local chief of police or Sheriff's substation commanders. If drugs or drug odors are detected during a search, the school administration and local authorities handle any disciplinary action toward students.

Training and Certification

The K-9 Unit's multipurpose dogs are trained in the areas of building searches, drug searches, article searches, tracking, and handler protection. K-9 teams also train for helicopter deployment, because they are sometimes transported via helicopter to avoid getting stuck in



PHOTOGRAPHER: DEPUTY ROBERT BATZLOFF

■ **Above:** Deputy Robert Loken and K-9 Kaiser conduct a school search for narcotics.



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The Unit has one of the few dogs trained for arson detection in Michigan: K-9 Blaze.



■ Above: It's training day for Oakland County Sheriff's officers and service dogs (left to right): Deputy Michael Richardson and K-9 Boss, Deputy David Roddy and K-9 Rudy, Sergeant Joseph Lambourn, Deputy David Curtis and K-9 Finn, and Deputy Lonnie Mullins and K-9 Boomer.

rush-hour traffic or traveling long distances across the county. For outdoor training, the K-9 Unit has available a 2.4-acre parcel of land donated by the Oakland County Parks Administration.

In addition to the K-9 Unit training on its own each day, the Sheriff's Office has set aside four eight-hour days per month for group training. All teams are certified by the National Association of Professional Canine Handlers.

Handler Experience and FLSA

Officers entering the K-9 Unit have an average of 10 years of law-enforcement experience. The number of officer years in the unit ranges from one to nine. Handlers receive one-half hour of overtime pay per day plus a take-home car. The department also provides a kennel and all veterinary services. Once a month, a veterinarian provides an in-house checkup and advice on canine care. Additionally, the department pays for two in-home visits by the veterinarian per year. ■

DEPLOYMENT

Canines Increase Successful Outcomes

"From my days as a street officer, I've always been a believer in and supporter of canine units," Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard says. "We started this K-9 Unit with four teams, and it's now up to 14 dogs. The canines are a huge asset, and one that we've come to rely on. Without their unique capabilities and skills, in some circumstances, we may not have the same successful outcomes.

"For example, recently my narcotics-enforcement team stopped a car and was given permission to search. The officers had strong reasons to believe that there were drugs in the car; however, they searched the vehicle fully and found nothing. They brought a dog over, and the dog continuously hit on the car's gas tank area. The officers looked further — in the trunk and for hidden compartments — and still didn't see anything. But the dog continued to react strongly to the area where gas is put into the tank. So the team used a fiber-optic device that allowed them to see down into the tank, and they found a substantial quantity of cocaine shrink-wrapped in plastic, then wrapped in tube socks, then immersed in the gasoline. We wouldn't have found that without the dog indicating that we weren't looking in the right place."

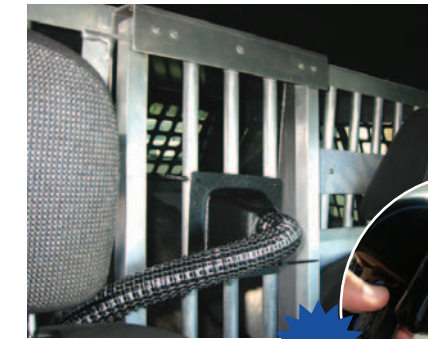
PHOTOGRAPHER: DEPUTY ROBERT BATZLOFF



■ Sgt. Dale Cason and Deputy Sherry Locher get ready to board one of the Oakland Cty. Sheriff's Office helicopters with K-9 Boss.



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