



Sugar Land's Hard Working Hounds

WRITTEN BY ASHLEY MILES

Taking a Bite out of Crime

They aren't your usual domestic pet, nor are they your typical crime fighter. These bloodhounds train each day, and with the help of the Fort Bend County Sheriff's department, are keeping Sugar Land safe.

Bloodhounds in Training

Deputy Keith Pickett with the Fort Bend County Sheriff's department and his wife, Karen, are the hounds' trainers and caretakers who are responsible for getting the dogs up to speed. "A typical hound starts training at eight weeks and will usually train for five to seven months, depending on the individual dog. When the dogs are 10 to 12 weeks old, they start to run 'blind trails,' meaning they never see the person, but they are given the person's scent to track," says Pickett. As the dog masters the track, the Picketts add time, distance, and eventually 90 degree turns. Throughout their training, the Picketts add wind to increase difficulty and distractions like people and other dogs. "When trailing in a neighborhood, the dogs have to remember to stay focused. They can't stop to smell the tree or another dog," says Pickett. If they forget, one snap of the harness with the command, "leave it, good boy/girl," reminds the dog to focus on the trail. "We teach them the way we would teach a child, with corrections and rewards. After a trail, we walk them home and allow them to smell the tree from before," Deputy Pickett says. The dogs work in small increments when introduced

to something new, so they don't get frustrated. After training, the dogs go to work at about eight or nine months old.

Why Use Bloodhounds?

Part of the scent-hound family, these dogs were so highly bred in the 12th century for hunting that they became known as "bloodhounds" in reference to their pure blood and noble breeding. According to the American Bloodhound Club, "The Bloodhound is a steadfast trailer, built for endurance rather than speed. Its long ears stir up scents as they rake along the ground, and its short coat protects it from being caught in brambles." The most noted characteristic is their nose. "Their big, long nose allows them to smell 26 times stronger than a human. If a human's olfactory organ is the size of a golf ball, then a Bloodhound's is the size of a basketball," says Deputy Pickett.

Sugar Land's Hounds

The Picketts didn't plan on becoming trainers. Deputy Pickett was first an engineer and then a school teacher, and his wife currently teaches elementary school. The couple became interested in training hounds after they experienced their first bloodhound, Samantha, and quickly discovered that she loved to trail. The Picketts started volunteering her to help find lost people. After success with Samantha, they began looking for hounds to train. At the moment, the Picketts have four hounds, Quincy, who has worked around 2,800 cases, Jag, James Bond, and Clue.



Quincy and Clue

In order to find hounds with an inherent tracking ability, the Picketts look for the most active and curious of the litter. If a group of puppies is sleeping or eating, the couple will look for the puppy whose curiosity is so high that it runs to see who walked into the room.

Living the Sweet Life

These amazing hounds don't know a retirement age. The good life for them is getting up and going to work with Deputy Pickett. "If they're left at home, they think they're being punished," says Pickett. The good life for Quincy, Jag, James, and Clue is to be out doing what they do best, and that's trailing. **SLM**

ASHLEY MILES is a recent graduate from St. Edward's University with a degree in Communication. She hopes to share her love of writing through teaching.

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