

Local dogs train for search and rescue

BY EMILY BATTMER
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Kirksville resident Al Maglio spends every waking moment with his dog.

As a certified trainer-handler, Maglio said it's important to devote hours to training and developing a strong relationship with his dog, Sheba, who is trained for skills including agility, search and rescue, and narcotics detection.

Maglio said he started his independent canine unit, NEMO Search and Rescue (SAR), last year. He previously had worked with a canine unit based in Kansas City, and realized there was a need for a team in the Kirksville area, he said. The corporation currently involves three canines. Two other handler-trainers work with the corporation from Harrisburg, Mo., but Maglio said Sheba is the first working dog in Kirksville able to do search and rescue.

Because Sheba would be the first respondent for a local SAR scenario, Maglio said it's important for him to work with the dog daily and spend as much time with her as possible.

Sheba eats every twelve hours, he said, so when there is an emergency, she always has something in her stomach. He works with the dog all hours of the night and day. Instead of keeping a strict training schedule, he said he likes to "mix it up" so Sheba is never used to any specific situation.

"We go for a one or two mile walk every day, seven days a week, year round," he said. "I'll purposely take the dog out when there's a rainstorm, snowstorm, ice on the ground, so she'll get used to every situation."

Maglio said training is like a part-time job. He works with the dog 10-20 hours per week.

"It's more time commitment than it would be to have a baby," he said.

Whenever possible, Maglio said he takes his dog with him everywhere to expose her to many different situations. He eats all of his meals with his dog and said he is the only one who can feed her, train her or give her commands.

After spending so much time with Sheba, Maglio said they've developed a bond as strong as he'd have with his children or wife.

"The dog is actually like my



Search dog Sheba pauses last Thursday during a workout in dog handler Al Maglio's backyard in Kirksville, Mo.

partner in life," he said. "This dog eats, sleeps and moves with me."

Canine handler Erin McGruder said she also understands the importance of working with her dog, Cutter, daily.

"I would compare it to trying to teach something to a child," she said. "It's always a game. It's always supposed to be fun for the dog."

McGruder said Cutter is trained to work off-leash. She wants the dog to be able to work without depending too much on the handler, she said, so the training schedule is flexible.

"There's no such thing as a typical training day for us," she said. "Ultimately, I want to just drive my dog to the scene. I don't want him focused on me all the time, I want him to go out and independently think."

McGruder said most of Cutter's training is slipped into his daily life through five to 30 minute intervals of training exercises, and all of his training is designed to be a game for the dog.

To keep the training schedule more dynamic, McGruder said she also has traveled out-of-state to train in new places with different scents and scenarios. She has worked in Indiana, Texas, Nebraska and Kansas and said she tries to make a trip every month or so to prevent the dog from getting "burnt out."

McGruder and her dog work with several search and rescue teams, and she said her dog is trained for disaster work as well as wilderness search. It's gratifying work, she said.

"There aren't a lot of opportunities anymore to do good that don't involve writing a check to someone else," she said. "We have the skills and inclination to work with dogs, the time to commit, and it's a niche

we feel we can fill and do good with."

McGruder said she would rather be called to 100 scenes and find out there's no one to be rescued than miss one opportunity where she and her dog could have helped.

"If we get called to a scene and are instrumental to helping find someone who is lost, you can't put a price tag on that," she said. "It's a calling, and it's a way we can help society."

Handler Aaron Betts said he also felt called to work with search and rescue dogs. When Betts first adopted his border collie, Teddy Ten Speed, he was only looking for companionship.

Betts quickly realized, though, that his dog was smart — and he knew the dog could serve a higher purpose.

"The idea of saving somebody's life, getting the chance for my dog to prove that he's capable of doing that special thing...If you've got an animal with that capability, why should you not use it?" he said.

Betts works with Teddy every day, and said practice almost never ends. Because of the work and education it requires, he said search and rescue is not just a hobby, it's a lifestyle.

While the lifestyle isn't always an easy one, Betts said he finds it enjoyable and knows that it is worth it. Not just any dog can be a search and rescue dog, and he said it means a lot to him to have a dog with those abilities.

Even though his dog went from being a companion to his working partner, he said their relationship hasn't changed.

"You spend a lot of time with your dog and you learn all their quirks and little habits," he said. "I'm madly in love with Ted and he's madly in love with me."

NEMO Triathlon athletes benefit

Local residents and athletes compete in the annual NEMO Triathlon

BY DAVID HUTCHINSON
Staff Reporter

When Omaha, Neb. resident Ken Deman competed in his first triathlon during 1980 he couldn't swim. He covered the 200 yards in Lake Manawa by alternating between the backstroke and dogpaddle.

"We had to swim out to two people in a canoe and it wasn't anchored," Deman said. "The wind kept blowing them further and further out so the later you started, the further out you had to go to get to them. By the time I finished I thought I was dead."

After his experience, Ken said he and his wife, Carol, enrolled in a master's swim course at the University of Nebraska-Omaha and joined a myriad of other fitness clubs so the next triathlon would be easier to complete. They have been competing in triathlons ever since.

Longtime competitors like the Demans, and organizers of triathlons like Dan Martin, Student Affairs director of A.T. Still University and organizer of the annual NEMO Triathlon, have watched the sport grow and have grown alongside it.

Carol said she began competing in triathlons because an old friend of hers inspired her. She said since 1980, she and her husband have been to the world championship five times and have been competitors at the national tournament hosted by USA Triathlon numerous times as well.

Carol said competing in triathlons has improved her health. She said triathlon competitors cross-train, which ensures their routines stay vigorous and helps prevent injuries.

"I think I have far more energy since I started doing them than when I did when I was younger," Carol said. "I always played basketball, volleyball and some other things, but this keeps you in far better shape."

In addition to the health benefits of competing in triathlons, Carol said her involvement with the sport helped her kick some of her bad habits such as alcoholism, because of the strenuous training required for success.

"It gives you confidence,

keeps your life a little straighter," she said. "Since I started this stuff, I didn't want any part of beer anymore."

Now, she and her friend, Mariana Phipps, another triathlon competitor, only drink nonalcoholic beer, she said, giving them the familiar taste of beer without the alcoholic content.

The Demans said they have been competitors in the annual NEMO Triathlon for more than twenty years, traveling 250 miles from Omaha each year to Kirksville to race. They said they travel so far each year to compete because the NEMO Triathlon is one the better organized races and one of the few races continually organized by the same individual.

During the early 1980s, Martin said he noticed Kirksville lacked a community event promoting healthy behaviors. He said at the time, marathons were becoming more popular, but marathons were more successful with larger crowds. The solution, he said, was a triathlon, which posed its own problems like how to safely oversee 200 competitors in open water.

This year, Martin again organized the annual NEMO Triathlon which took place Sunday Sept. 9 at Thousand Hills State Park and had more than 200 competitors, including Truman State University President Troy Paino and the Demans.

Martin said even though he only sees the competitors for two days each year, he still feels he gets to know them. During his 28 years as organizer, Martin said he has been able to make many new friends like the Demans because participants flock to Kirksville to swim, bike and run. Participants return to compete year after year, he said, and many returners are A.T. Still and Truman students, creating a feeling of ownership of the town for returning competitors. The triathlon, he said, alters the perceptions of those who compete to see big and exciting things happening even in small places like Kirksville.

"What's really difficult for [college students] to say out loud is 'I live in Kirksville, Mo.," he said. "And that's one of those mentalities that I think changes when you begin to participate in things and can connect with people in the community. I think it changes your perception of this little town."

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