

# Cass County Life

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## VARIETY

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■ Training Saturday on the Atlanta schoolgrounds are these four members of Four States Search and Rescue. From left are Courtney Greig and Clio of Atlanta, Christi Rhyne and Recon of Bloomburg, Tracy Pounds and Talon of Atlanta and Russell Voegtanz and Anka of Texarkana.

## Search and Rescue

### Dogs, their humans put in a lot of work to train for successful missions

STORY AND PHOTOS  
By NEIL ABELES  
Cass County Life

Care to be part of the following organization?

- Voluntary
- Pay your own way
- Little or no individual recognition

- Train every week, in rain, snow or swamp
- Success often tinged with disappointment

No way, you say. What kind of organization is that?

Well, add this part. You'll work with a dog and together go on search and rescue missions.

Oh, boy, yes, indeed. I want to do that. Sign me up.

And so it is for the Four States Search and Rescue team, a group of nine to 10 individuals and some 20 dogs who will go on missions within a 100-mile radius of Texarkana.

Their three specialties are these: trailing, air scenting and water human remains detection.

First, to understand this organization, one must understand its view of "team."

There is no individual glory in this association. No best dog. No finding of the lost child by the one member.

Such a story will not appear in the newspaper. The organization's work is almost beneath the radar of the public eye, said its secretary and longtime leader Tracy Pounds of Atlanta.

"The reason is all the complex training we have gone through, all the depending upon each other. No one succeeds in this incredible task by themselves.

There are no egos here," she said.

The group is also a team within a team, for they are civilians called to help legal authorities. Their personal safety depends upon the protection of the larger team.

And, finally, the animal and its owner are the exquisite team. It takes two years to train such a team. Many a dog and human do not pass certification. And they do not keep it if they don't continue to train.

"We have to make sure those who want to be a team member understand what they are getting into," Pounds said. "Training means at times being out in the worst of places and conditions. It's all year long. Almost the only spare time activity a person can have."

#### THE DOG

The first important realization is that a search and rescue dog has trained for a year or more and thoroughly enjoys its work.

It will ignore food or treats and easily overheat itself with tireless excitement and determination if not watched.

Each dog is individual, some better at one type of tracking, not so good or interested in another.

The bloodhound, for example, the keenest of all trackers, can follow one person's scent through a crowded football stadium.

Each dog's movement and personality must be read by its handler. Another human called

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■ Humans and animals at Four States Search and Rescue practice enjoy playing games. Do you think Guernsey the bloodhound is just waiting for Bill Cargile to tell him what to do? No, Cargile has some food treats in his coat pocket. The dog can certainly smell that.



■ The look on Russell Voegtanz's dog Anka says it all. She can hardly wait to begin training for search and rescue. Her specialty is air-scenting. She will find any human in the woods.

■ Right: A very promising young dog in search and rescue is "scenting." That's Christi Rhyne's dog Recon. The scent item is the hat on the ground. In a moment, Recon will begin trailing that scent across a paved road and through pines trees to find the hiding individual.



■ Right: Recon, the Doberman search dog, pulls Christi Rhyne rapidly along. The dog was momentarily fooled but is sure now and does indeed find Russell Voegtanz, who can be seen at left in the picture hiding behind a tree.



■ Above: On a clear and cold Sunday afternoon at Rocky Point, several members of the Four States Search and Rescue team prepare a weekly training session with their dogs. From left, Robert Gallagher has the flag-sticks to guide the humans while J. K. Gray, Russell Voegtanz and Danita Gallagher have their dogs at ready. The individuals at right will be the hidden targets.

## Dogs

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a flanker goes with these two because the pair may easily become lost in the rush.

They may get into danger or overlook evidence.

Usually the rescue team is not called upon until 12 or 24 hours after a person is missing. It may be rainy, stormy or windy. The trail may cross rivers, highways or mountains. Still the dog tracks.

And one observation to anyone witnessing? These are the happiest dogs in their work one will ever see.

#### THE HUMAN

"Our biggest satisfaction is finding someone. That's the reason we spend the money and time," said President J.K. Gray of Texarkana.

"We aren't always successful, perhaps 25 percent of the time in my experience, because of the variables. But maybe we find the general area or direction for the search to be pursued.

"And even when we do find the person, but too late to rescue them, you have still helped the family. There's no joy, but there's closure."

College student Courtney Greig of Atlanta, a new member of FSSAR, is fortunate in that she has been given a German shepherd who is learning fast.

Courtney herself trained several months with the team before getting the dog. She was often the person laying the trail or hiding out in the woods. She would take along a book and sandwich.

"Once I was out there four or five hours before being found," she said.

She sums up the challenge and rewards:

"It takes the two of you. Dogs are like a bunch of babies, and they don't think about things the same way we do. So it takes both of you to solve the mystery. To be a searcher is to be this and nothing else. It's all or nothing," she said.

The FSSAR has an informative website which can be found by Googling that name. The service's president J.K. Gray may be contacted at 903-794-3185.

#### SUSTAINING SUPPORT

Four States Search and Rescue Inc., a nonprofit entity, is basically self-sufficient. It needs no pat on the back, extra encouragement or motivation.

It does, however, need sustaining support.

Every expense is borne by the volunteer. That is, the dogs and their training, travel, equipment such as radios, time away from jobs and more.

This is a best practice for FSSAR. No other way is wanted.

But public sponsorship of a dog, which starts at \$200, is definitely welcomed. Such a sponsorship results in a framed photograph of the dog and certificate of appreciation.

Often, in heartfelt appreciation, families or friends of those rescued by FSSAR offer money when a mission is ended.

It is not accepted. FSSAR is a service organization for all.

Dog sponsorships, however, are an entirely different matter. They are appreciated and needed. To become a sponsor, call Tracy Pounds at 903-826-4493.