



SAN FRANCISCO FIRE DEPARTMENT

Public Information Office

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Press Release

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SFFD CANINE SEARCH TEAM WELCOMES 3 NEW CANINES AND HANDLERS

The San Francisco Fire Department (SFFD) has taken another step toward the integration of search dogs assigned to SFFD firehouses. Three SFFD Firefighters were paired with their search dog partners on September 25th, 2015. With the addition of the 3 newcomers, the San Francisco Fire Department will have a total of 4 of these highly trained and certified search Canines to aid in protecting our city, and Nation if needed.

The handlers all volunteered by submitting a letter of interest and were then selected based on their qualifications. The three new handlers are:

1. Lieutenant Gareth Miller, partnered with K9 “Vita”
2. Firefighter Edward Martinez, partnered with K9 “Fritz”
3. Firefighter Eli Thomas, partnered with K9 “Vader”

These members will join Canine Coordinator Captain Peter Gross, and K9 Angus. The three new SFFD Canine Search Teams hope to successfully complete Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) certification in early 2016. They will become a local resource for the SFFD and the California Office of Emergency Service (CAL-OES). They will also become a federal asset of California Task Force 3 (<http://www.catf3.org/>), a FEMA task force, hosted by the Menlo Park Fire District, as part of the National Disaster Response System.

THE CANINES

The 3 Labrador Retrievers all were identified as good search dog candidates and rescued from the shelters that housed them by the National Disaster Search Dog Foundation throughout the United States. The Canines then trained at the National Training Center in Santa Paula, Ventura County, California. After the Canines passed

their initial 10-day training, they were paired with their new SFFD Handlers.

FEMA-certified, Urban Search and Rescue, search dogs are specially trained to alert rescuers of the location of trapped or entombed survivors. They specialize in searching collapsed buildings; commonly occurring after large earthquakes. The SFFD will also use them to search at local, isolated incidents that result in missing or unaccounted individuals.

The Canines are trained to alert on the presence of live-human scent, are agile and driven to cross the top of, or interior of, a collapsed structure. The Canine and their handlers train frequently to ensure they are both well prepared for their job. The teams also must train to re-certify every 3 years by FEMA.

HISTORY

In March 2013, the SFFD began a pilot program that allowed a FEMA certified search dog that a firefighter trained and enrolled with CA-TF3, to be allowed to join his firefighter/handler during his shift. This has led to the addition of the three new canines. These canines are the same type of search dogs that staff the 28 FEMA task forces that makes up the National Disaster Response System; and the same canines that have been used at large disasters such as: Hurricane Katrina, Sandy, and the 9/11 attacks at both the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

The San Francisco Fire Department welcomes the newest canine members, and is pleased to be able to provide a more comprehensible service for our community.

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