

Military working dog adoption group finds homes for retired K9s (5 p.m.)

By Daniella De Luca/For the Sun-News

Posted: 08/09/2009 05:01:45 PM MDT

ALAMOGORDO — Debbie Kandoll received an e-mail on her phone last Friday morning from Roger Thornton with the subject line, "Is it Monday yet?"

Thornton, a Las Cruces resident and 55-year-old retired Army veteran, has been waiting for this Monday. This will be the day a retired military working dog (MWD) will join his family. Contract working dog (CWD) Lando is one of 18 retired working dogs placed through Military Working Dog Adoptions, a private organization led by Kandoll and two other volunteers with similar missions — to quickly find homes for dogs scheduled to be euthanized.

"We're going to kick back and enjoy our retirement together. He deserves it and so do all military dogs," Thornton said.

"Supporting your troops doesn't just apply to humans; It applies to K9s too," Kandoll said. "This mission is a critical one. America's MWDs are unsung heroes but are always there for their troops." The organization, in the process of filing to become a 501(c)3, is trying to increase awareness of regulations when retiring a dog while also placing retired military working dogs in homes at a faster rate.

Kandoll and husband, Mike, adopted their own retired military working dog, MWD Benny B163 (Ret.), in January 2008. The Kandolls saved Benny, a German shepherd, from being euthanized due to a degenerative spine disease and other minor health conditions preventing him from continuing his career. It's apparent by Benny's open-mouthed doggie "smile" and playful waves and salutes that he's grateful for the second chance.

His ever-vigilant nature and obedient personality were what inspired Kandoll to get Benny certified to become a therapy dog one month after adoption. The duo regularly visits Alamogordo sites such as Casa Arena Blanca Nursing Home and The Aristocrat Assisted Living Center as well as William Beaumont Army Medical Center in El Paso to visit veterans and children. They also travel the state and region to promote the organization and adoptions.

Benny, who will be 12 years old on Sept. 11, spent 10 years of his life sniffing out narcotics and patrolling in Langley Air Force Base in Hampton, Va. with the U.S. Air Force. During his time serving in the military, he had 12 different handlers. Kandoll calls herself his "lucky 13" and plans on being his final owner.

Kandoll hopes with enough support and donations — both time and monetary — she will be able to cut through some of the red tape and bureaucracy when it comes to adopting a military dog. All proceeds go to the retired military dogs, she said. Setting a standard length of time for retiree paperwork to be processed and listing all adoption-suitable retired MWDs on the Lackland Air Force Base Department of Defense Web site are two main goals she has in mind.

Although the days are long and filled with many presentations, meetings, luncheons and therapy sessions, Kandoll says Benny and other military working dogs inspire her to persevere.

"He won't let me quit," she said. "Many heroes are contemplating their todays because of their military dogs and what they did for them yesterday. We owe that devotion a measure of loyalty."

For information and instructions on how to adopt a military working dog visit militaryworkingdogadoptions.com or call (505) 990-8147.

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On the Web

To get information about adopting a retired military working dogs, visit militaryworkingdogadoptions.com or e-mail info@militaryworkingdogadoptions.com

Upcoming speaking presentations about military working dog adoptions are:

- Tuesday, Alamogordo VFW at 7:30 p.m. (575) 434-9271
- Wednesday, Mesilla Valley Kiwanis Meeting at Furr's Restaurant in Las Cruces, noon. (575) 526-4401, x5981
- Thursday, Alamogordo Sertoma Club Meeting at Desert Lake Golf Club, noon. (575) 443-5272