

Crockett



Photo: Denise Sanders

In the fall of 1995, SDF Founder Wilma Melville teamed up with Pluis Davern, master canine trainer and owner of Sundowners Kennel in Gilroy, CA, to begin a new training program for America's Search Dogs and handlers. Over the past 17 years, Pluis, her daughter Kate, Sharon Hanzelka, and their team, trained a total of 144 Search Teams and created a training program that set the gold standard in the field.

With our Training Center under construction in Southern California, closer to SDF's home office and Program

staff, on July 1, 2012 Pluis officially passed the leash to SDF's new Lead Trainer, Sonja Heritage. Sonja and her team, Lyz Gregory and Lee Culley, are out at the National Training Center every day, transforming unruly, high-strung bundles of canine energy into focused, skilled, Disaster Search Dogs.

July 30, 2013 was a momentous occasion for the Search Dog Foundation, marking the graduation of Crockett, the first dog trained from start to finish at the NTC. He was partnered with veteran handler Tim Robertson of Sacramento Task Force 7; ushering in a new era for SDF.

Crockett had been picked up as a stray in Virginia in the spring of 2012 and was transported to the Animal Welfare Association of Voorhees, NJ, where trainer

*"The National Training Center has not even opened its doors to the public and already we have a milestone to be proud of! Crockett, from a shelter in my home state of New Jersey, is the first of many dogs making the difficult and amazing journey from rescued to rescuer."*

— Wilma Melville, SDF Founder



Photo: Karyn Newbill

Phil Guida noticed Crockett's drive and focus and contacted SDF. Crockett's x-rays showed a serious amount of bird-shot spattered over one side of his body, so we assume he was the victim of an assault by his former owner. Together we worked to bring Crockett to the West Coast to begin his new career.

For the last several months SDF's training teams have been perfecting Crockett's search skills, bark alert, response to hand and whistle signals, and obedience commands. They transformed a dog who had been abandoned on a roadside to an athlete and finely tuned search machine. Crockett made it from rescued to rescuer!

Sacramento has special significance as the city where SDF placed our first Search Dogs, Ana, Dusty, and Harley with Firefighters Rick Lee, Randy Gross, and Rob Cima. We have begun this new era with the same Task Force that SDF partnered with to give America this new resource.

Crockett and the new generation of SDF Search Dogs have very big paws to fill as they carry on the legacy of all the extraordinary canines trained in Pluis' expert hands.

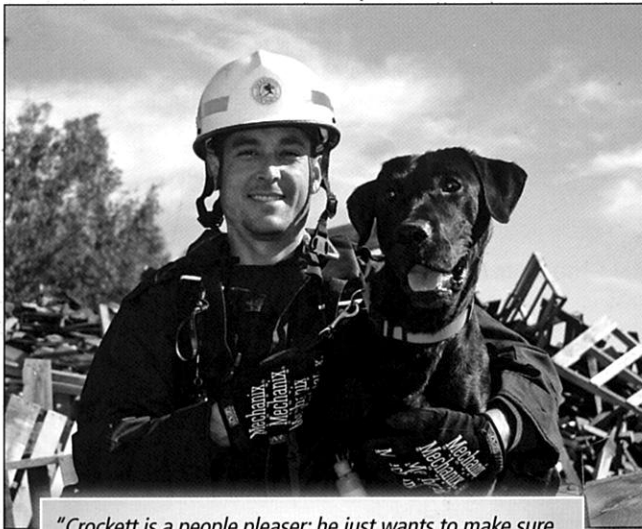


Photo: Kyle Thomas

*"Crockett is a people pleaser; he just wants to make sure that everyone is happy. He's a big lovey guy but he works hard and makes all the hard work that goes into being a handler worth it. I can't even find the words to express how awesome a partner he is. I am honored to carry on the legacy of the original SDF handlers from Sacramento and know that Crockett will make them proud."*

— Tim Robertson

*"It's an honor to know that Crockett is following in Ana's footsteps. He and Tim can now train to the highest level and will be an asset to Sacramento City Fire, our community, our state and our nation."*

— Rick Lee



Sonja & Crockett – a rowdy "tug" reward Photo: Hope Blueberry