



# Haiti's Search Dog Heroes

## *Seven Canines and their Human Partners Help Save Lives*

### Baxter

Baxter, a homeless and forgotten male Golden Retriever, was rescued from the streets of Northern California by Homeward Bound Rescue & Sanctuary. In February 2006 his life would change dramatically, when, noticing his extraordinary drive, SDF volunteer Jessica Drew brought the dog to the attention of SDF, and he immediately proved himself a true standout among canines.

After eight months of training at Sundowners Kennel, it was time for SDF Lead Trainer, Pluis Davern, to match handlers and dogs. Finding the right partner for Baxter was easy. The first time the group of new handlers was introduced to the dogs in Baxter's graduating class, Baxter ran over to Gary Durian of the L.A. County Fire Department and lay down by him for a brief moment. And the rest is history.

The two make a great team. "Baxter is phenomenal," said Gary Durian's Training Group Leader Marc Valentine. "He's steady and dependable on the rubble pile and dynamic when searching." That dependability and teamwork has taken Gary and Baxter far. In February 2007, Baxter and Gary passed FEMA Certification. In 2008 they were deployed to the Gulf Coast to search for survivors following Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. In addition to national deployments, Gary and Baxter have also deployed to several local disasters including a major vehicle accident in 2009.



### Cadillac

Cadillac ("Caddy") was born December 2006 into a litter bred for Guide Dogs for the Blind. Although he was a sweet dog that liked to cuddle when the family would sit on the floor with him, he was way too driven, playful and rough to be a Guide Dog. His owners knew that these very traits were high predictors for success as a Search Dog. Cadillac was accepted into SDF's program and was soon paired with Firefighter/Paramedic Jasmine Segura of the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

"He's very calm," Jasmine laughed, "until he sees a toy. Then he becomes very driven and would go through a brick wall to reach that toy!" Some dogs take their time climbing a pile of debris, but Cadillac will run full speed up a big rubble pile—just to get rewarded with a toy. Jasmine has trained him to come to an immediately Stop, Sit and Stay with one whistle blow. "It's impressive to see Cadillac go from a full run to a Sit in a heartbeat. I love that he has an on/off switch, and that he's a crazy, goofy, spirited guy." In March 2007, Cadillac graduated from SDF's program and went on to achieve FEMA Certification in April of 2008.



### Dakota

SDF Handler Julie Padelford-Jansen, a Miami Firefighter, had learned the ropes of Canine Disaster Search and Rescue with her first Search Dog, Lilly-Belle. This beautiful Golden Retriever was rescued in New York and charged into Julie's life in 2005. In October 2006 the pair attained FEMA Certification and responded to disasters such as Hurricane Wilma in 2005 and Hurricane Ike in 2008.

Dakota was born in Germany and raised to be a police dog. But when he arrived in the U.S. and was evaluated for police work, they discovered that he was a little "soft" for the job of a law enforcement canine. A friend at the police department recognized Dakota's potential and told Julie, "You've got to come see this dog!" Julie's reply was "I don't need another dog!" But within moments of meeting him she was amazed at the dog's ability. With Lilly-Belle getting ready to retire, Julie decided to welcome Dakota into their lives.



Within nine months they became FEMA Certified as part of Florida Task Force 2, re-certified in December 2009, and just weeks later were deployed to the Haiti earthquake. "This was Dakota's first big deployment. He was phenomenal. Very agile, and he covered the rubble quickly. He would go into holes in the rubble and disappear and sometimes would wind up exiting from another hole that was clear on the other end of the rubble." Florida Task Force 2 is credited with seven rescues in Haiti and Dakota was directly responsible for alerting to two of those survivors at a school.



## Dawson

Named "Jo-Jo" at birth, Dawson was born a "singleton" (the only pup in a litter) in Dillon, Montana. There he was given to licensed vet technician and long time friend of SDF, Kellee Matthews, who felt he would make a good candidate for our program. After six months of training at Sundowners, Dawson was placed with experienced SDF handler Ron Weckbacher. Ron was previously partnered with Manny, an SDF-trained Search Dog who was about to retire.

Ron and Dawson achieved a very special status in disaster work--certifying in both recovery of deceased victims and rescue of the living. In 2006, they became certified as a Disaster Recovery Team for the state of California's Office of Emergency Services, Law Enforcement Branch. Having already responded to numerous disasters, in 2008 Ron decided to expand his and Dawson's work to live scent rescue and with that came some changes: Dawson and Ron now use a special set of commands to differentiate between recovery and "live scent" searching.



## Hunter

Hunter, a red and white Border Collie puppy, lived with Patricia Baldwin, who loved him dearly in spite of his tendency to chew everything in sight and his unending need for exercise and "work" (such as herding the other dogs at the dog park). Patricia knew she had to find a new home for her ambitious puppy and donated Hunter to SDF to be trained as a Disaster Search Dog.

In 2004 he was partnered with Captain Bill Monahan of L.A. County Fire Department. Initially, it was touch-and-go with Hunter, who wasn't responding to training. Bill soon realized that Hunter didn't want a toy to tug like other Search Dogs. He only responded to the visual stimulus of the toy flying out of the alert tube—like a sheep leaving the herd. So Bill altered his training method and began using a throw reward rather than a game of tug. Instant response!



Bill learned that if he kept all his movements constant, Hunter performed "like a machine." He can't wait to come out of his kennel and do what he's trained to do. "Hunter is an outstanding dog all around," Bill said. "I think he will be one of the great ones!" In May of 2006, Bill and Hunter attained FEMA Certification test. In 2008 they responded to the deadly Metrolink crash in Chatsworth, CA, flying in by helicopter to search for survivors.

## Maverick

Maverick was born on July 23, 2002 to owner Karen McLaughlin in New Mexico. Karen was familiar with the work of the Search Dog Foundation, and thought he would make a great Search Dog because he was so energetic. This dog never wanted to stop and take a break, always wanted to run and play and absorb all of your attention. She knew he would be happiest at SDF, so she donated him to the organization.

SDF learned that not only was Maverick disciplined and focused, he was a very lovable companion, happy to see everyone he met. He was teamed with Jason Vasquez of L.A. County Fire in August of 2007. The team made quick progress and became FEMA certified in November 2007. They deployed to Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in the Gulf Coast in September of 2008.



## Pearl

Pearl's first owner wasn't home much, so the dog would frequently jump the fence and go looking for fun. Inevitably she would be picked up by animal control. After paying the "bailout fee" one too many times, the owner saw the hopelessness of the situation and surrendered her to the shelter.

SDF Volunteer Penny Woodruff evaluated the beautiful Lab she called "Black Pearl" and found that she possessed every quality that was sought after in a Disaster Search Dog. "Within five minutes I knew we had a winner," said SDF Canine Manager, Karen Klingberg. "This dog could not sit still. All she could think about was finding and retrieving the toy. If the toy went into dense shrubs, Pearl would barrel in and find it.

After completing her training in of July 2008, Pearl was assigned to Ron Horetski of L.A. County Fire. They achieved FEMA Certification in May of 2009 and were deployed shortly afterward to a building collapse in La Puente, CA.

