

Illinois' Conservation Police Officer team includes five labrador retrievers, ready, willing and able to put their nose to the proverbial grindstone.

Partners Against Crime

Story By Kathy Andrews
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Like many youngsters, Charlie was full of energy and doing his share of running around during the Illinois State Fair.

Unlike many wandering through the displays and entertainment venues at Conservation World, Charlie's activity wasn't from a post-funnel cake sugar rush. Charlie is one of five narcotic dogs working for the Department of Natural Resources.

Crowds gathered around as Conservation Police Sergeant Hank Frazier explained that the dogs are trained to find five odors—heroin, methamphetamine, crack cocaine, marijuana and powder cocaine.

"We look for dogs with high drive," Frazier said. "These dogs are trained to locate illegal drugs by rewarding them with their toy. The more they want to



play and be rewarded with their toy, the better they are at finding narcotics."

But their work doesn't stop there. In addition to searching for narcotics, the dogs are trained to perform article searches—looking for hidden items, such as evidence in a crime. Another valuable skill the dogs have is conducting area searches, locating lost people.

"The level of training the dogs receive has advanced considerably over the last four years," Frazier said. "The last two dogs received for the team walked into the field with better skills than the first three. Each dog—and their trainer—goes through weekly training to

reinforce skills and to stop bad habits before they get ingrained.

"These dogs have proven to be a great asset to law enforcement agencies throughout the state," Frazier continued. "But one of the biggest rewards we get is from the interactions we have when the dogs go on the road to schools, senior citizen programs and fairs. People love to watch the dogs work and they develop a greater understanding of the value of these dogs for enforcing the law."

Sergeant Hank Frazier and Jack

The veteran among the dog team is Jack, a 6-year-old black lab in the field



for five years and purchased by the LaSalle County State's Attorney.

"One of Jack's most remarkable accomplishments occurred the first day he was in the field," Sergeant Frazier said. "On our way home from his training we stopped at Starved Rock State Park and Jack alerted to drugs in the first car we stopped. The young adults in the car couldn't believe the dog could find anything that small."

CPO Chris Mohrman and Chance

A 4-year-old black lab, Chance has been working since mid-May 2003 and



CPO Greg Rowe and Shadow greeted visitors to the Illinois State Fair. Above, from left to right, the officers and their canine partners are: Greg Rowe and Shadow, Dan Lewis and Charlie, Holly Vadbunker and Leo, Hank Frazier and Jack, and Chris Mohrman and Chance.

made his first bust on Memorial Day that year.

"Chance is a small dog so it is easy for him to get into tight places," CPO Mohrman explained. "Because of the area we patrol, Chance is involved in a lot of water patrol investigations and helps identify situations where drugs are present in watercraft."

Donations from throughout the Jackson County area, including the Kinkaid-Reeds Creek Conservancy District, Kinkaid Village Marina and the Murphysboro Local of the Plumbers and Pipe Fitters Union made the acquisition of Chance possible.

CPO Greg Rowe and Shadow

A keen eye for a top-notch canine police dog helped rescue Shadow from the pound.

"A good friend of mine is a canine police officer and heard about a dog in the pound that appeared to have potential," CPO Rowe explained. "After a few days of testing he found that

Shadow had what it took to be a narcotic dog and we proceeded with the full training."

Also a black lab, Shadow was busy his first year on the job, making several drug arrests—resulting in nearly \$6,000 in fines—three public appearances and three school searches for drugs.

CPO Dan Lewis and Charlie

Charlie, a yellow lab a little over 2 years old, is one of two dogs purchased through a grant from the Illinois Conservation Foundation and trained during the summer of 2004.

"In just the first few months after Charlie was available to assist in the field, he assisted with 15 drug searches," said CPO Lewis. "My job has changed entirely since I partnered with Charlie, and each day we work together we become a better team."

CPO Holly Vadbunker and Leo

Also received through the 2004 grant from the Illinois Conservation Foundation was Leo, now a 3-year-old yellow lab.

"Leo quickly proved his tracking ability by locating a couple of fishermen in a remote location," said CPO Vadbunker. "The training these dogs get is phenomenal and I expect Leo will be instrumental in a lot of drug, area and article searches."

