

Drug dog champs: Tango, Kash, Kilo

BY JANICE MORSE • JMORSE@ENQUIRER.COM • DECEMBER 31, 2010

LEBANON - Warren County's award-winning trio of canine cops made 2010 a little easier for police throughout the region.

The dogs - Tango, Kash and Kilo - responded to calls for help hundreds of times in Butler, Warren, Hamilton and nearby counties. They are credited with arrests and drug busts that never would have happened if not for their special sniffing skills, said John Burke, commander of the Warren County Drug Task Force.

"All three of these dogs have just been phenomenal," Burke said. "We couldn't be happier - they're three of the best dogs anywhere."

All three have won Ohio Law Enforcement K-9 Association competitions. The dogs were tested on how quickly and accurately they could sniff out narcotics, apprehend suspects and obey their handlers.

Warren County Sheriff's Deputy Kelly Hammonds and canine Tango, a black German shepherd, earned the title "Top Dog," for the best overall score. The duo beat 12 teams from throughout Southwest Ohio. Tango also placed second in narcotics detection.

Kash, a Belgian shepherd, and his handler, Deputy Brian Lewis, won second place in obedience and third place in criminal apprehension.

This year was the first full year of service for both of those dogs.

A third dog, Kilo, has been at work for several years.

This year, Kilo won first in narcotics detection. He also won first and third-place medals in two out of three

narcotics categories in 2009.

In 2008, Kilo won two third-place medals in the narcotics competition. He won "Top Dog" in the narcotics competition in 2007.

Kilo is credited with the group's most unusual find of the year - a stash of black heroin, hidden behind some drywall seven feet above the floor of a garage.

The dog put his paws on a car and kept looking upward; his handler, Lewis, told federal agents "look up high," based on the way his dog was behaving. As a result, the federal Drug Enforcement Administration found \$100,000 worth of the illegal drug at that Dayton, Ohio-area bust.

"Brian knew something was hidden up high because he knows how to 'read' his dog," Burke said. "They truly are a team; a dog is only as good as his handler is."

Kash is trained to sniff out currency and illicit drugs but he also has an unusual skill: sniffing for seven of the most commonly abused prescription drugs.

He was believed to be the Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky region's first police dog to be trained in that specialty. However, his use in that capacity is limited.

Because prescription drugs are legal to possess with a valid prescription, Kash can only be used to sniff out prescription drugs in situations where a person has consented to search or the situation otherwise met legal standards for a search, Burke explained.

So Kash has been used mostly for his other abilities, Burke said, but he expects use of the dog for prescription drugs will increase. "Word still hasn't gotten out" about his specialized skill, Burke said.

The dogs, which cost about \$5,000 to \$8,000 each, were all bought at no cost to Warren County taxpayers,

Burke said. Funds from drug cases and a grant from the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators paid for the animals.

