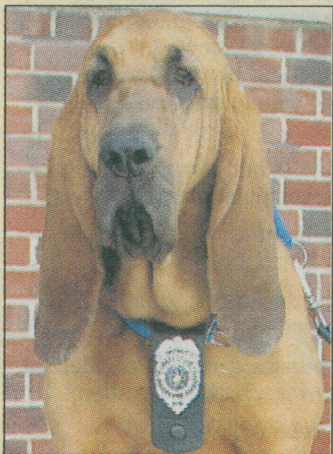


## Summit Search and Rescue



SUBMITTED

Detective K9 Merit is one of the bloodhounds Summit Search and Rescue provides to assist in finding missing people and to assist police with criminal investigations.

**SUMMIT SEARCH AND RESCUE** in Fairview Township provides bloodhounds to assist in finding missing individuals.

Jim and Terri Heck and their three bloodhounds, Apache, Boone and Merit, are ready to respond on a mo-



**SUBURBAN LIFE**

# Dogs on the job

By **BARB KREBS**  
For the *Weekly Record*

Many local families foster puppies in preparation for their future as working dogs.

They are part of the York County 4-H Seeing Eye Puppy Club and their job is to “nurture a puppy to accomplish its special destiny,” that of a guide dog for the blind, through The Seeing Eye of Morristown, New Jersey.

Harriet Hombach of Mount Wolf is the leader of the local club and she and her husband, Richard, have opened their home and their hearts to seven puppies over the years.

The puppies are seven weeks old when they come to their foster family. The training includes that of most puppies, being housetrained and learning some basic commands such as sit, rest and come. The puppies also will meet lots of people as part of their training.



SUBMITTED

Lexi, the golden retriever, and Cadbury, the cocker spaniel, therapy dogs with KPETS, visit with their friend Florence ‘Flossy’ Garner at the Mennonite Home in Lancaster.

## KPETS

**KPETS**, or Keystone Pet Enhanced Therapy Services, is a nonprofit organization established to promote animal-assisted therapy services, according to Karen Gerth, its founder and executive director.

“We are therapy dogs. Our dogs are our pets,” Gerth said. “We visit nursing homes and hospice and juvenile detention centers. We are there for reading programs in schools and libraries, and hospitals are beginning to open their doors to us.”

KPETS provides healing and rehabilitating benefits through human-animal interaction, and a therapy team of a handler and pet goes wherever the human-animal connection might be beneficial in order to provide therapeutic benefits to physically, emotionally and mentally challenged people.

“All dogs have different personalities and skills, and what we do is find out what works,” Gerth said.

KPETS has more than 200 volunteers, provides services to more than 150 facilities and has an extensive mailing list to match volunteers with requests. Services are provided on a volunteer basis and there is never a fee, although donations are greatly appreciated, Gerth said.

KPETS has one major fundraiser a year and donations from presenta-



Apodhous, Boone, Boone and Merit, are ready to respond on a moment's notice to find a lost individual, whether a child or an Alzheimer's patient, or to assist law enforcement in a criminal investigation.

The bloodhounds are trained to follow a person's scent wherever that person has gone, and training begins at an early age, Terri Heck said.

The scent-discriminatory ability is inherent in the bloodhound, but continued training for the lifetime of the hound is a necessity.

"Finding a person is the most wonderful thing they are going to do, and we start them as puppies," she said.

On their first day of training they are fitted with a little harness and soon learn that harness means it is time to go to work.

SSAR averages 60 to 70 calls a year, and it is always rewarding to find someone who is lost or to help police officers track down a suspect, but there is another side to Summit Search and Rescue.

They do about 80 public service programs a year, visiting senior centers and schools, Scout troops and a variety of other groups, Heck said.

The dogs have won awards and have been recognized for their work by local law-enforcement agencies, and the human members of the team are proud of their accomplishments, but the public service programs are a big part of their job, she said.

Summit Search and Rescue is nonprofit and offers its services free of charge. However, donations are gratefully accepted.

For details, go to [www.ssarbloodhounds.org](http://www.ssarbloodhounds.org), email [SSAR1@comcast.net](mailto:SSAR1@comcast.net) or call 442-7627.

part of their training.

"Our main job is to socialize them. We take them to Dutch Wonderland, where they even ride the rides, like the merry-go-round and the tram," Hombach said. "We take them to Revolution games, and we are planning a trip to New York City."

The dogs went to an ice-hockey game, where everyone around them was screaming and yelling while the dogs lay quietly by their foster parents' side, she said.

They go the movies, ride buses and trains, go to the supermarket and the library or visit a school. They do all the things they are likely to do once they are partnered with a blind person, Hombach said.

When the puppies are 14 to 16 months old, they are returned to The Seeing Eye in Morristown, N.J., for more training.

Rubin, the Hombachs' current puppy, has reached that age and, while it won't be easy to say goodbye, they know it is time for the yellow Labrador to begin the next phase of his life.

"You cry. I've cried every time it happens, but it is so fulfilling when you see them reach that part of the life that they were born and bred to do. It is amazing. People don't give dogs enough credit," Hombach said.

Instructors will train Rubin in

the quiet residential streets and country roads in and around Morristown and the streets of New York City, and they will visit shopping malls and other busy places.

Foster families are allowed to watch their puppy in a training session with an instructor, but can have no contact with the puppy they raised. It is a sad time but also a proud moment, Hombach said.

"It is hard. You cry when you see them, but you are so proud to see that puppy you took at seven weeks is now ready to lead a blind person," she said.

Once Rubin has completed his training he will be paired with a blind person and they will train as a team, traveling the same streets, visiting the same areas as he did with his instructor, so they can navigate safely through daily life in their hometown.

As she prepares to surrender Rubin and looks forward to welcoming a new puppy into her home and her heart, Hombach will continue to work with her therapy dog, Mattoon.

Mattoon, a black Labrador and the grandfather of Rubin, came to the Hombach home as a puppy. He had such outstanding qualities that when he returned to The Seeing Eye he was put into the organization's breeding program. After more than four years he was put up for



SUBMITTED

Wyatt Bailey works with Sammy during his physical therapy sessions at Schreiber Pediatric Rehab Center.

adoption, and the Hombachs were able to bring Mattoon home.

Hombach knew Mattoon was an exceptional dog and wanted to put his skills to good use.

"That's when I found KPETS and Karen," she said.

Mattoon has found a new "leash" on life as a therapy dog, and his days are filled with visiting children and the elderly in all sorts of places.

"We go anywhere someone has a request," Hombach said.

KPETS has one major fundraiser a year and donations from presentations and events also help cover expenses, but people can visit the website at [www.kpets.org](http://www.kpets.org) to find out how they can help, she said.

For details, visit [www.kpets.org](http://www.kpets.org), email [info@kpets.org](mailto:info@kpets.org) or call the toll-free number, 888-685-7387.

## Susquehanna Service Dogs

**SUSQUEHANNA SERVICE DOGS**, a program of Keystone Children and Family Services, trains and provides service dogs and hearing dogs to assist children and adults with disabilities to become more independent.

Keystone Therapy Dogs, a program of Susquehanna Service Dogs, is a group of specially trained individuals and dogs that provide professional-level therapy visits throughout central Pennsylvania. They primarily focus on supporting children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Details are available at [www.keystonehumanservices.org](http://www.keystonehumanservices.org).

## Online

**TO LEARN MORE** about service dogs, see this story at [inyork.com/community](http://inyork.com/community).

For pet news, lost and found listings, adoptions, photos, videos and more, visit the YDR Pets blog at [www.yorkblog.com/pets](http://www.yorkblog.com/pets).