

By Colleen Dugan

Phoenix Center graduate Jessica Nixon grins as Principal Janice Lazzari remarks on her achievements, and fellow graduate Crystal Herman looks up and applauds. The Phoenix Center graduated 11 students on June 4.



# County dog wins big at bomb-sniffing competition

By HEATHER RAWLYK  
Staff Writer

It was just another day at work for Rocky, the explosives-detecting black Labrador retriever.

But for Deputy Sheriff 1st Class Michele Goodman, the U.S. Police Canine Association's national competition last month was a chance to prove the county Sheriff's Department has one of the top dogs in the nation.

The duo made a name for themselves at the Tennessee-based competition May 18 through 21, where they competed against two dozen explosives teams from across the nation. They returned to Anne Arundel with three trophies and an overall 2nd place finish, said Deputy Sheriff Harry Neisser,

a county Sheriff's Department spokesman. They also took first place in a search exercise paired with a K-9 team from the Central Intelligence Agency.

Deputy Goodman, 35, of Annapolis, said she thought she and Rocky, a 4 1/2-year-old rescue dog, would at least certify. She had no idea they'd return home with so many accolades.

"I knew he'd do a good job," she said. "I knew we would. But I didn't know we'd do this well. I just let my dog do what he had to do, and I trusted him. He's a great dog."

Any law enforcement K-9 team could participate in the event. Deputy Goodman had never competed before, but in February thought it'd be fun to test Rocky out at the

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Photo courtesy of the Anne Arundel County Sheriff's Department

Deputy Sheriff 1st Class Michele Goodman handles partner Rocky as the 4-year-old Labrador sniffs for hidden explosives at the U.S. Police Canine Association's national competition in Tennessee last month. The duo competed against 24 teams from across the nation and brought home three trophies and an overall second-place finish. They also took first place in a search exercise paired with a K-9 team from the Central Intelligence Agency.

## AWARD

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regional competition, which showcased agencies from Maryland, Virginia, Washington, D.C. and Delaware. Since they finished well, Deputy Goodman thought it wouldn't hurt to try out the national competition.

At the national competition, the explosives teams were tested on searching for "hides" — a training aid made of real explosives, like TNT or detonation chords — in a vehicle and in a room.

"There were two hides in the vehicle and two in the room," Deputy Goodman said. "You have to find all four hides, and you can't have a miss. When you're done, you have to tell the judges exactly where the explosives are hidden, based on what the dog showed you. A lot of it is knowing your dog and trusting your dog."

The deputy said she can easily tell when Rocky is onto an explosive.

"He does a passive sit," she said. "I can tell when he's on an odor because his tail will wag and he'll back up and sit down. You just know the change of behavior."

Judges ranked the performance based on how the dog

and handler worked as a team. She said she was surprised and excited to win so many awards. She isn't sure Rocky knew he'd won anything.

"He just thought he was out for another day of work," she said, laughing.

Deputy Goodman and Rocky were the only K-9 team to represent Maryland, and are one of two explosive-detecting K-9 teams within the county Sheriff's Department at the Circuit Courthouse in Annapolis.

The deputy has worked with Rocky since he was discovered at a rescue shelter in Frederick about three years ago.

"He lives with me, goes on vacation with me — I'm a single woman with no kids, so he's like my family," Deputy Goodman said.

In the morning, the black Labrador knows he's going to work based on the collars the deputy puts on his neck.

"He knows the uniform," she said. "So when I get going, I put the (collars) on and say, 'It's time to go to work, let's go,' and he's ready."

On early morning shifts, Rocky and Deputy Goodman search the empty hallways and courtrooms to make sure no firearms or explosives were snuck in the building overnight.

"We check all the trucks and

deliveries and basically patrol the courthouse," she said. "We check illegally parked cars and any bags sitting around the courthouse. We'll check the judges cars on a daily basis."

"And if Annapolis or county police have a bomb call we help out. So we do get to leave the courthouse every once in a while."

To keep the dog's nose up to snuff, Deputy Goodman and Rocky participate in bi-monthly, eight-hour training exercises with county police K-9 units.

County Sheriff Ron Bateman said he and the department are proud of the deputy and her four-legged partner.

"These awards are a testament to the state-of-the-art training and outstanding level of service our K-9 section provides," he said.

Deputy Goodman said she and Rocky will likely return to the national competition next year, and hopes the other half of the Sheriff's Department's K-9 crew, Deputy First Class Jason Jett and his partner Levi, will join them.

"I'd like to compete as a department — me and Jason," she said. "I think that would be great."

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