

The American Kennel Club Awards for Canine Excellence (ACE) 2006

The American Kennel Club (AKC) is proud to announce the recipients and Honorable Mentions for the 2006 Awards for Canine Excellence (ACE). Established in 2000, ACE has become a valuable public-outreach program for the AKC as well as a source of pride among the fancy and the dog community.

A photograph and story about the recipients in each of the five categories; Exemplary Companion, Law Enforcement, Search and Rescue, Service, and Therapy are shown below along with photos of this year's Honorable Mentions. The five recipients will receive their engraved silver collar medallions and \$1,000 cash awards at a presentation ceremony at the AKC/Eukanuba National Championship in Long Beach, California, on December 2-3, 2006. A local presentation will also be held for each recipient at an AKC dog show near their hometown. This information will be posted on our Web site when it becomes available.

Presenting the 2006 Honorees for Awards for Canine Excellence

Service Dog: Aspen

Labrador Retriever

Owner: Katherine R. Huggins of Enid, Oklahoma

Aspen, an 11 year old yellow Labrador Retriever, has been Katherine Huggins' constant partner since puppyhood. Katherine, suffering from Cerebral Palsy, chronic pain and seizures, purchased Aspen with the intention of training her as a service dog. She worked with several prominent behaviorists to teach Aspen the skills she needed. Then, at 6 months of age, Aspen revealed a remarkable ability that amazed even her instructors: she could predict Katherine's seizures. Aspen's gift for alerting eventually turned into a gift of freedom for Katherine. Aspen's ability to predict seizures up to 30 minutes in advance allowed Katherine to have her life back.



Working as a team, Katherine and Aspen have set no boundaries. As a Public Fire & Life Safety Educator, Katherine teaches safety and rescue procedures to rescuers and fire departments. With Aspen's help, she provides demos for rope and water rescues and teaches valuable lessons to rookies and seasoned firefighters alike. "Aspen helped me realize that my disability doesn't define me. I define myself by my abilities," stated Katherine in her nomination.

In 2000 Aspen won the Delta Society Beyond Limits Award as Central Region Service Dog of the Year. Aspen's achievements have inspired Katherine to share her training methods with others, which have been used by countless dogs and owners, including 130 veterinary referrals. With the success they have shared, Katherine has decided to start a service dog training center in Enid, Oklahoma, which she hopes will train and match service dogs with disabled children ages 10-18.

At 11 years of age, Aspen has lost her vision, but not her trust in Katherine. Just as Aspen adjusted to her owner's disabilities, Katherine now works to ensure Aspen maintains the same quality of life. The bond of trust between them is infallible and gets them through the trials they face each and every day.

Honorable Mentions: Service Dog:



Boogie, Bullmastiff
Owner: Jon Schechter



Candy, Golden Retriever
Owner: Patty Dobbs-Gross



GG, Golden Retriever
Owner: Gina Mosley



Maximus, German Shepherd
Owner: County of Shasta California
Handler: Deputy Pat Kropholler



Lee Luu, Border Collie
Owner: Joseph Escobar



Ollie, Poodle
Owner: Elizabeth Jackson

Law Enforcement Dog: Rex

German Shepherd Dog

Owner: Jamie Dana of Colorado Springs, Colorado

Rex is a retired military working dog. With his partner Tech Sgt Jamie Dana, Rex served in the United States Air Force as a bomb detection dog. The pair worked for three years on assignments in the US and abroad until June 2005 when Jamie volunteered herself and Rex for a tour of duty in Iraq. The pair soon headed fearlessly into the war zone.

Months passed and Rex saved countless lives by detecting bombs planted by insurgents. One day on the way back to base Rex and Jamie's humvee was hit by a roadside bomb. It was demolished by the sudden blast and Jamie suffered life threatening injuries. Barely clinging to life, she was rushed to a field hospital where doctors said she might not make it. When she asked about Rex, she was told that he did not survive the blast. Little did she know, the faithful canine had been thrown clear of the wreckage and narrowly escaped with only minor injuries. Soon afterwards, it was discovered that the blast had been triggered by a remote control bomb. It became obvious that the insurgents had targeted Rex because of his outstanding ability to detect their bombs.

Rex was sent to Walter Reed Hospital to comfort Jamie as she recovered. She asked if she could adopt Rex, knowing that they would soon be separated by Rex's obligations as a military working dog. The Air Force declined her request because Rex still had another 5 years to work. As a result of this devastating news, another type of battle was fought, this time it took place in the halls of Congress. In December 2005, legislation was passed that would allow Jamie to take Rex home.



Honorable Mentions: Law Enforcement Dog:



Cody, Belgian Malinois
Owner: Sharon Sparks



Arno, Belgian Malinois
Owner: Louisiana Dept of Public Safety and Corrections
Handler: Major John C Smith



Holly, Brittany
Owner: Sandy Davis



Rika, German Shepherd
Owner: Vicki Wooters



Quint, German Shepherd
Owner: Geary County Sheriff's Dept
Handler: Carlos J Roman, Undersheriff



Ranger, Belgian Malinois
Owner: Rocky Hill Police Dept
Handler: Officer Joseph Phelps

Search and Rescue Dog: Morgan

English Springer Spaniel

Owner: Katrene Johnson of Lebanon, New Jersey

Morgan is a certified wilderness air scent, water and cadaver search dog through West Jersey K-9 Search and Rescue Specialty Search Associates. She is also a therapy dog with Bright and Beautiful Therapy Dogs. Morgan and Katrene Johnson have participated in more than 50 searches nationwide and in each case, her search and rescue and therapy talents have provided assistance to victims and relief workers alike.

In September 2001, Morgan and Katrene were called upon to search for DNA material at Staten Island's Fresh Kills Land Fill, the site where the debris from Ground Zero was deposited. Morgan faithfully searched the quarter square mile pile of debris, alerting on any DNA that could be found. Her contribution helped to give numerous families the answers they sought about their loved ones. During breaks, workers were often comforted by Morgan as she shared her gift as a therapy dog by resting her head on tired knees and accepting soft pats.

Then in 2005, Morgan was instrumental in the relief efforts of another catastrophe. She was called upon by Hancock County, Mississippi officials to help them track down their missing citizens after the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina. Morgan and the other SAR dogs were responsible for clearing neighborhoods before residents returned to survey the damage to their homes. "Out in the field, each dog/handler team headed to their assignment. Morgan searched the wreckage out of earshot of the other teams. It was almost silent - all the birds and almost all the insects had been driven away or washed away by the storm," Katrene wrote in Morgan's nomination.

Morgan used her talented nose to assist the search and rescue teams in dutifully locating all missing citizens of Hancock County. As evacuees returned to areas that were cleared by the teams, Morgan was once again called upon to offer comfort.



Honorable Mentions: Search and Rescue Dog:



Brenner, Belgian Tervuren
Owner: Kimberly Gilmore



Marco, Boxer
Owners: Kelly and Mary Jo Tucker



Obi, Rottweiler
Owner: Shirley V Lawatsch

