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Pit Bull Lovers Fight Back

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EXETER TOWNSHIP, Pa. -- Over the past year, Sage has been training to sniff out those in need.

Video Report



While she's not the first K-9 to become part of the Blue Mountain Search and Rescue Team, she is the first pit bull to be trained to find missing people in trouble, reported NBC 10's Stacey Weaver.

Calling the dog "a sweetheart," Winterstein said Sage is a shining example that there is definitely another side to this breed.

Many people contacted NBC 10 to tell us about what they say is the "other" story about pit bulls.

This after Greeyli Gonzales was bitten in the leg as she got out of her car on Windsor Street in Reading. It was the city's 33rd recorded dog attack of the year -- the 22nd by pit bulls.

Gonzales suffered deep puncture wounds down to the bone. The dog that attacked her was euthanized.

City officials are thinking about activating a dangerous dog ordinance scheduled for next year, but pit bull owners are fighting back.

"I am the proud owner of two pit bulls, and they are wonderful," wrote an NBC 10 viewer named Audrea. "It is a shame that some people would ruin the reputation of a great breed because of their own irresponsibility and selfishness."

Another viewer, Sue, said of her pet: "She loves people, including kids, listens very well and is a great dog. She does not like other dogs, so we keep her away from them. But she does have respect for the two cats that she lives with."

Even Winterstein admitted he was unsure about bringing a pit bull onboard the Schuylkill County search and rescue team.

But after watching Sage grow, the head of the rescue group said the pit bull has become the perfect example of how the breed can be, if trained the right way.

"If these people could see a dog that's a pit bull-mixed that actually does something for humanity, they would change their minds," Winterstein said.

"...I don't believe it's the dogs that do this. I think it's the people that own these dogs that train these dogs to do whatever they're doing, to bite, to attack or whatever," he added.

Winterstein said he is fed up with the bad rap pit bulls have gotten because of the recent rash of dog bites in Reading.

"Everybody always sees the junkyard dog, the dog that's in the back yard tied up on the chain. They don't see this pit bull with an orange vest on running through the woods looking for somebody. I mean, it shocked me," Winterstein said. "It actually shocked a lot of the people in the K-9 community."

Sage knows all about being rescued. Her owner, Julie, saved her from an animal shelter when she was just a puppy.

Sage has about a year more of training left before she'll be tested for state and national rescue certification.

When asked if he worried the dog could ever turn on them and his volunteers, Winterstein said, "No I'm not.

"That dog is treated like a baby at home. It's loved," he said. "I'm very proud to have it."

The team was headed to a rescue in Hazleton on Tuesday night. Because Sage isn't yet certified, she couldn't join them on the mission, but her handlers wish she could, Weaver reported.

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