



SAROM: Trained and ready to help police find the missing

by Holly Nelson

OSCODA – They are trained, ready and able teams of humans and canines, ready to respond at a moment's notice to help find the missing.

Unfortunately, however, the members of Search and Rescue of Michigan (SAROM) aren't called out as much as they'd like.

Founder and coordinator Eliza-

beth "Buffy" Galer of Mio blames it on the "Sandy Anderson stain."

It was a reference to the notorious Sandra Anderson who duped authorities around the world by planting bogus evidence for her dog to find at suspected crime scenes, then passing it off as genuine.

They now only get one or two calls a year, according to Galer.

Still, the dedicated members of SAROM – both human and canine – devote hours each week and month to maintaining their readiness for when that call comes from a police agency wanting help to find a missing hunter, a lost child, a wandering Alzheimer's victim or a body.

SAROM members only respond to requests from police, Galer said. She stressed this.

According to C. David Wright, M.D. of Oscoda, who is among SAROM's members, the teams are trained to work hand-in-hand with law enforcement, not to interfere but to help.

The volunteers gather monthly for training exercises which mimic the real thing, he said. This is in addition to daily or weekly training between the canines and their handlers.

Dr. Wright was the coordinator of SAROM's February exercise, held Sunday at the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base in Oscoda.

The day before, he seeded the old base with human scent, hair, bones and blood for the dogs and their handlers to find.

SAROM has trailing dogs, tracking dogs and human remains detection dogs, as well as area search dogs. Some are scent specific, while others are cross-trained.

A tracking dog is trained to scent and follow footprints, while a trailing dog scents the general environment to follow a person's path of travel. An area search dog locates anyone in a given area, while a cadaver dog searches for remains, Wright explained.

The exercise brought together most of the group's 25 volunteers, along with supporters. Members of the Alcona County Amateur Radio Group were present to also lend a hand.

Galer said SAROM met the radio group at an actual search in Alcona County. The technology proved invaluable – so much so that team members must now be amateur radio operators.

One of the first assignments went to Mony, a 4-year-old German shepherd trained as a trailing dog by its owner, Mike Peters of Lupton. Mony was given a paper towel which had been seeded with the scent of a volunteer the day before. "Find!" Peters told Mony. He did so in short order – following his nose to one of the seven local volunteers, age 3 to 80, enlisted by Wright to be victims for the day.

SAROM was formed in 2001, its mission to provide free assistance to law enforcement agencies in locating missing persons and to interact positively with similar agencies and extend working k-9 contact information to law enforcement, according to the mission statement.

The team will go anywhere in Michigan, according to Galer, but its focus is the northeast corner of the Lower Peninsula, an area bounded by M-55, I-75 and Lake Huron.

The volunteers are largely from the area they serve and come from all walks of life – a university computer whiz, a physician, business owners, veterinary techni-



Photo by Holly Nelson

CAN WE GO AGAIN? – Echo, a 5-year-old Belgium Malinois, seems to be asking owner Ethel Settler of Holly for another task – this after returning from eight finds of bone, blood, tissue and hair which had been hidden on the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base a day earlier.

cians, retirees, even youth.

Erin Robson is 17, almost 18, and is from Whittemore. She has been involved with SAROM since 2001, as has her mother, Lynn Robson.

Their participation was, according to Lynn, a response to the overwhelming helpless reaction they experienced following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11.

Erin has her own dog, a 2-year-old golden retriever named Opal, which is cross-trained for area and tracking, while Lynn's dog is a white standard poodle, 8-year-old Odie.

There are six junior members, including 10-year-old Drake Wil-

lobec of Mio. He got into it because his family dog is one of the trained canine trackers.

Matthew Shaw also comes from Mio and is 14. He heard about it and signed up simply because he loves dogs, he explained.

Any canine breed can be trained for search and rescue, according to Ethel Settler of Holly, who came to the exercise with her two dogs.

"It's the individual dog, not the breed," she explained. "We test them for willingness to work, their play drive and then train those which have good traits."

Some of the dogs come from

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Photo by Holly Nelson

TRACKING ORDERS – Odie and owner Lynn Robson get instructions from exercise coordinator, Dr. C. David Wright, before heading out to look for a missing child.



Photo by Holly Nelson

MY TURN – Odie is led to the command center by Erin Robson. A standard poodle does not seem a likely breed for search and rescue, but Dr. C. David Wright says, if you are lost, Odie is the dog you want to be looking for you.



Photo by Holly Nelson

WAITING ORDERS – SAROM Director Elizabeth "Buffy" Galer and Fly, her 1-year-old bluetick, await the order to begin searching for a missing person, which is passed along by Alcona County Amateur Radio Group member Bob Colarusso (WB821R) of Ossineke via a radio transmission.

BUSINESS

SJHS to open new walk-in clinic next month in Baldwin

BALDWIN TWP. — As part of St. Joseph Health System's commitment to expand access to care and meet the needs of the community, the health system reports it will open the Huron Shores Walk-In Clinic in March.

The new clinic will be located in the Baldwin Plaza on US-23 and will provide high-quality care in a convenient setting, health system officials said.

The common illnesses that will be treated at the clinic include colds, influenza, sinus infections, allergies, minor burns and rashes, pinky, sore throat, headache, ringworm, warts, ear infections and urinary tract infections.

"Access to cost-effective, convenient and high-quality care is critical for a community to grow and prosper," said Cheryl Gueldenzopf, administrative director

at St. Joseph Health System. "In this current economic climate, it is imperative our health system provides the infrastructure for access to high-quality care that goes beyond the normal business day."

In partnership with the Oscoda Health Park walk-in clinic, the new clinic will operate at different times to accommodate the needs of the community and out-of-town visitors. The hours of operation will be Mondays through Fridays from noon to 8 p.m. and Sundays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

"The Oscoda Health Park walk-in clinic has been so successful that the volume frequently exceeds capacity," said Rachel Estabrook, director of communication. "The health system is striving to meet the needs of the community by offering another location for acute care."

Money management program offered

TAWAS CITY — Michigan State University Extension will offer a one-hour workshop on managing and saving money at 10 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 21, at the Iosco County Annex in Tawas City.

This free program is based on MSU's money management education series and one by Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation called Money Smart. The annex is located at 420 W. Lake St.

"Knowing what you spend your

money on sounds easy, but many of us don't have a good idea of our monthly expenses," said Iosco County MSU Extension Director Bill Carpenter, who is conducting the workshop. "It might sound strange, but this is as good a time as any to start saving and we can show you how."

There are 15 seats for the program and registration is necessary by calling 362-3449.

SAROM

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shelters, she added.

All of the dogs at the exercise were friendly, well-behaved and eager to greet visitors until, that is, their owners took out the search and rescue vests. Then the focus was to go to work.

SAROM dogs must pass a working-dog aptitude and temperament test consisting of elements which show the dog has a sound temperament, strong desire to please, interest and natural ability to use its nose for work. A SAROM dog must be agile and intelligent, according to Galer.

Training is based on the dog's natural ability and a dog-handler team can achieve mission ready status after 18 to 30 months in training.

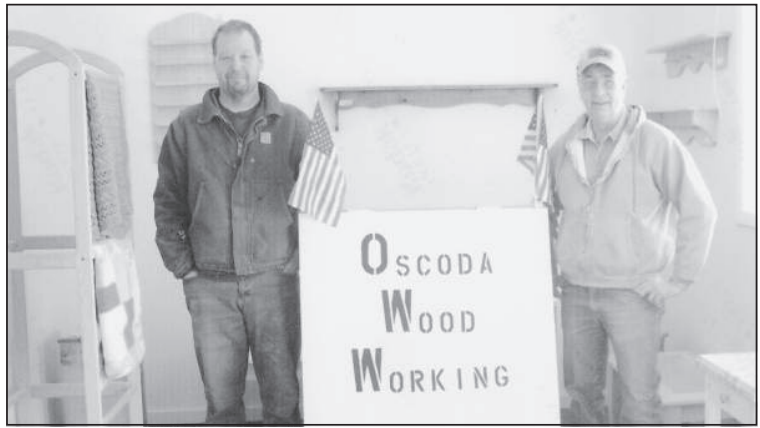
SAROM volunteers say it is preferable to start with a young

puppy, but dogs can be as old as 3½ and still be successfully trained.

The human team members also go through intense training and a certification process before they will be sent out on an actual mission, Galer said. Training includes field scouting, crime scene preservation, communications, proficiency with maps and compasses, record keeping, survival skills, also CPR and first aid for both humans and dogs.

Further information about SAROM can be obtained from its Web site, www.saromdogs.com, or by asking a volunteer or calling or writing Galer at 989-826-2195, P.O. Box 333, Mio, MI 48647.

Law enforcement officers who need SAROM services can call the page-out numbers, 989-247-0230 or 989-222-3149.



Courtesy photo

CRAFTSMEN — Oscoda Wood Working co-owners, Randy Avery, left, and Doug Fosgitt, refinish and custom-make wood products.

New business handcrafts wood products

OSCODA — Oscoda Wood Working is open and performing custom wood working and refinishing. Special orders will be considered.

"All products are hand-crafted with solid wood from local mills, right in the Oscoda area," stated owners Randy Avery and Doug Fosgitt.

Avery is the former owner of Handy Randy's and Fosgitt has 30 years of wood working experi-

ence, including building kitchen cabinets.

"Our goal is to produce quality, made-to-order products at an affordable price from local products and to help the local economy," the owners said about the shop that opened on Jan. 2.

The business is located at 5650

F-41 in Oscoda. Winter hours are Monday through Friday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Summer hours will be Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Individuals may call 739-2724 or 820-4963 for additional information.

MSU Extension offers regional farm education program Feb. 26

WEST BRANCH — Michigan State University Extension is offering a crops, manure and management program for field crops and livestock farm operators on Thursday, Feb. 26, at Forward's Conference Center in West Branch.

MSU educators in farm management, field crops, engineering and livestock will present information to help producers make economical choices in crops and

manure usage, as well as the latest information on water use reporting requirements.

The program is \$25 and will last from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., with lunch included in the fee. The program is sponsored by extension offices in Iosco, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Arenac and Gladwin counties.

More information can be obtained by calling the Iosco County office at 362-3449.

Shelter, Inc. sets auction and concert

ALPENA — Shelter, Inc., is hosting its 10th annual Concert and Silent Auction on Saturday, March 7, at the Alpena High School Stanley Beck Auditorium.

The auction begins at 6 p.m. and the concert follows at 7 p.m.

There will be performances by Ed Dowling, Laura Frawley and the AHS Women's Chorale. Tickets are \$10 for adults and

\$5 for students and are available at Alpena Alcona Area Credit Union, Neiman's Family Market (Tawas and Alpena) and all Northern Area Federal Credit Union locations.

Shelter, Inc., services North-east Michigan and has a facility in Oscoda. For more information, call 356-6265.

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