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Gladstone Sun-News

Rescued dog becomes valuable working companion

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Jackie the Jack Russell terrier may be the luckiest dog alive.

TRAINING ZipZap Termite & Pest Control owner Jeff Preece works with Jackie the Jack Russell terrier on locating the scent of termites on her training wheel. Jackie trains daily. She has been trained to seek out termites.

After spending most of the first year of her life in a Florida kennel, Jackie's bright eyes drew the attention of master dog trainer Bill Whitstine.

He put the little dog through several preliminary tests and determined she could be trained for a job. Whitstine trains canines to sniff out bombs, drugs, money, weapons, accelerants, mold and termites.

Jackie is trained to find termites. Whitstine has trained about 180 dogs specifically to locate termites.

Not only is she working for the Northland company, ZipZap Termite & Pest Control, Jackie is working for local animal shelters.

"We decided because of her first year of life, we needed to give back to the shelters in our area," owner Jeffrey Preece said. "We will be looking at the shelters in the area to help. In her first week of business, Jackie earned \$40 for a shelter from the various inspections she worked."

Preece said he also wants to take Jackie into schools and in front of help organizations. He will talk about how a dog discarded can become useful.

"She is a teaching tool and maybe a means to get across a message that those dogs in the local shelters have a great value," he said.

Jackie may be the first termite-locator canine in Missouri.

"There is another lesson to be shared," he said. "She smells termite pheromones and has an accuracy rate of about 98 percent. As humans, we are far less accurate and depend on visible inspections, often when damage is starting and more apparent."

Preece said that equates to detecting damage three to four years before it is visible.

Preece ordered Jackie in October and brought her to Gladstone on SuperBowl weekend. The two spent a week training together in Safety Harbor, Fla.

"I told Bill I wanted a small, short-haired dog," Preece said. "We are still getting used to each other. It is always a learning process."

Jackie has 800 hours of training and continues to train daily.

Her food is her reward for pinpointing termites. If she is not actively searching, she trains on a wheel with several cups placed at the spoke ends. In the cups are a variety of scents from coffee grounds to candles to live termites.

Preece puts on the pouch that carries Jackie's dog food, tells her "Let's go to work," and spins the wheel.

"In the beginning I had a very militaristic sound to my voice and Jackie did not respond as well," Preece said. "Now I am more upbeat and encourage her to seek in a friendlier tone. I have to be upbeat because she needs to be upbeat too."

On a house search, Preece places golf tees to mark where Jackie believes termites live. He then brings her back to the spot four or five times to reaffirm her finding.

"I really believe now we are giving some of the best inspections possible," Preece said. "It took me two years to research and make the decision, but the investment is worth it. I figure she will pay for herself in three to four months."

The average training cost is about \$10,000. Preece said by next year, he would like to add a mold-sniffing dog to the company.

Preece plans to use Jackie as the company's new logo.

"Jackie is also a member of the family," Preece's wife Janet said. "I traveled with Jeff for training and found it amazing. Jackie's more than a worker, she is family."

Preece treats Jackie with affection, but holds back some.

"If we are too close, she will not work for me," he said. "I am protective of her though. I go into a house first and check for poisons and other harmful items. I bring her in and let the family meet her. Then I ask that all animals are put away and we are left alone. Jackie is social so we cannot have any distractions."

Janet said some of the rescued animals appear to have been abused.

"They overcome so much and then give back to us in ways we are unaware," she said. "Jackie is representative of some very special dogs."

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