

## **New K-9 unit barking up Pickens trees by the end of May**

Wasting no time after funds were raised, future K-9 officer Brandi Strawn departed immediately following the Dog Day event to enter training with the county's new drug dog.

The final \$4,000 needed to establish a K-9 unit came from the April 18 fundraiser. The total K-9 cost of \$20,000, all came from the local community.

"We had already put down a deposit on the dog," Sheriff Donnie Craig said. "And the day after Dog Day, [Deputy Strawn] left for training, check in hand."

Craig said Monday the K-9 officer and German Sheppard "Blecky" would be in training for three to four weeks in Florida. The training is seven days a week.

A vehicle for K-9 unit use had already been outfitted.

Craig said having a K-9 unit will open up a lot of potential for local law enforcement.

He said the dog can be used for both drug searches and tracking.

The tracking can be used for everything from a suspect who flees on foot to an Alzheimer's patient who gets lost, the sheriff said.

Craig said there are several places where he expects the canine drug search ability to assist human officers.

When serving search warrants, the ability to smell out drugs will make a difference. He said there have been times when officers have information about drugs in a house, but can't find anything once inside. Having a trained dog should really help with this, he said.

Craig said there have also been traffic stops when an officer suspected a car contained drugs, but hasn't had a dog available to conduct a search.

He said an officer can search a vehicle if a dog walking around it "hits." This provides probable cause for a search.

At present, the officers are prevented from holding someone on the side of the road "unless they can bring a dog in a timely manner."

Craig said having their own dog will change their general policy about school drug sweeps. Previously the schools were "locked down" during campus-wide searches. With their own dog, Craig said they will do more random spot checks without disrupting the entire campus.

There was some discussion about having a drug dog named "Storm," but the name has remained Blecky, its original name.

***Story courtesy: Pickens County Progress (05/16/2009 Edition)***

Note: As an update, the dog has recently arrived in Pickens County and is available for duty. It is not known at this time if it graduated early or has more training still ahead or the original training times were overestimated.