



NEWS RELEASE

Orange County Fire Authority
Community Relations & Education

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subject: OCFA's First Nationally Certified Search Canine Team Now in Service

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Irvine, CA – It took more than a year and a half of specialized training and numerous hours of hard work for Jester and his handler, Fire Apparatus Engineer Davis Doty, to become Orange County Fire Authority's first nationally certified search canine team. As part of OCFA's Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) team, canine handlers must be willing to dedicate 8-10 years to the canine program or to the working life of the dog. The program uses firefighters in cooperation with California Task Force 5 (CATF-5) and the National Disaster Search Dog Foundation.

"We are extremely fortunate to have this new search team available to the communities we serve," said Fire Chief Chip Prather. "Our canine handlers make a huge commitment to the US&R program. The long-term obligation to care for and maintain training for their canine partners is very lengthy. The amount of time spent away from home during travel and training requires substantial personal time as well as a tremendous amount of support from their family."

Dog teams have a very special role in the world of search and rescue. The dogs' ultra-sensitive hearing, night vision, endurance and keen sense of smell have continually proven to be invaluable in the effort to locate missing persons. Because of their extraordinary abilities, dogs are often able to reduce the time spent searching, thereby increasing the chances that the missing persons will be found alive. Experts estimate that a single dog team can be as effective as 20 to 30 trained human searchers in locating a missing person in a given period of time.

"Jester and I have been training together for almost two years," said OCFA Engineer Davis Doty. "Jester trained in Gilroy, California for six months and then they paired us together and we have been training since. For the first year, we are required to train daily for 30-60 minutes, whether at home or at the firehouse (after normal work hours). We also have search training at a disaster training site (such as a waste rubble pile or a recycling facility) one to two times a week for approximately four hours."

To become a certified US&R canine search team, a handler/dog team must pass the Office of Emergency Services (OES) skills assessment and then pass a FEMA certifying exam. This process takes 12 to 18 months. The team of Davis Doty and Jester are the only team from OCFA that are currently certified by FEMA. There are only 225 such certified dogs in the nation, with Doty's certification he will now join the six other qualified handlers as part of OCFA sponsored US&R CATF-5. As such, he will be undergoing further training to become a valuable part of the Task Force and the Nation's response to natural and man caused disasters.

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