

# Police Dog Talk with Peter Neary

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Easton is a dog loving town. Over 800 dog licenses were issued this year. For the most part, these are pets or self-appointed guard dogs.

Peter Neary, Easton's fire marshal, and his family have three Labrador retrievers, two yellows, Sally and Holly, and one black, Coal. "As in what a bad kid gets for Christmas," Neary joked. They are loving pets—and so much more.

All three have multiple certifications in police work from the International Police Work Dog Association. Think of them as the canine equivalent of PhDs in Search and Rescue. They are rigorously trained in a variety of tasks that exceed human capacity.

"A search dog has 44 times more olfactory sensory cells than a human. He's a super sniffer," according to Mike Doyle in *The Search Dog Handbook*. "Dogs are from one million to one hundred million times more sensitive than man to the scents of common body acids."

Search dogs are trained to find missing or lost people. They can be taught to locate both the living and the remains based on scent training.

It's important to dispel the images moviegoers have of police dogs who only pursue bad guys through steamy, dark woods and when they apprehend their prey—escaped

convicts and murderers—they viciously attack.

There are of course, attack dogs, (actually called bite dogs) and they are used to take down bad guys, but Search and Rescue dogs (SAR dogs) are trained in a variety of positive operations, many life-saving.

Training SAR dogs is an intense two-year process with specific areas of concentration. Neary has spent 11 years training and working with his police dogs, in part, because “my dogs need a job,” he said.

Not any dog can make the grade. Before pursuing “graduate degrees,” there must be early indications of potential,” Neary said. “Puppies are tested to ascertain their level of drive and determination. Are they aggressive? Eager? Do they have basic aptitude? At two or three months, you can generally tell. Sometimes it’s genetic.”



Sally, an eight-year SAR dog veteran, still enjoys tagging along when the Nearys’ dogs

go to work-Tomas Koeck photo

## **Sally**

Neary's oldest Lab, Sally, 12, is now retired after having been certified in two wilderness and two water search specializations for human remains. She sits at Neary's feet like a normal pet these days, but her desire to continue working is powerful. "When she sees me leaving to work with the other two, I know she wants to join them. So, sometimes I take her out with them because I know she loves it," Neary said a little wistfully.

In her eight-year career, Sally specialized in air-scenting in wilderness such as heavily wooded areas common to Easton. Air-scenting dogs, as the name suggests, keep their noses high to follow airborne skin cells that humans all shed as a matter of course. Someone lost and frightened sheds many more skin cells, or rafts as they are known, as a result of increased adrenaline.

Sally also certified in water recovery and cadaver work. It seems counterintuitive that a dog could follow the scent of a drowning person or cadaver in the water, but Sally could follow a scent through 300 feet of shoreline. Her skill set was especially useful in a community like Easton, which has so many bodies of water.

"Sally is a high-drive hunter and liked cadaver work," said Neary. "But she navigated extremely well in the woods and could work for two hours and cover 40 acres of land."



Neary with his three dogs: Sally, Holly and Coal-Tomas Koeck photo

### **The Mission Continues**

Holly and Coal are continuing to work with Neary, who donates many hours of his time to SAR training and answering the call when needed.

Currently, he is providing direction to Easton's Emergency Medical Service and Fire Department personnel in the implementation of disciplined search management activity.

"This is part of my journey, educating our service professionals to use the dogs to best advantage in our community."

Neary is a serious professional, but softens on the subject of SAR dogs.

"These animals do so much for us for so little in return," he said. "A meal, a ball and a

pat on the head. They really inspire me and inspire my journey.”

*Photos-Tomas Koeck*