



## Searchers use dogs to find lost pets

By MEGGIE DAVIS Staff writer

A dog with a keen sense of smell might be your missing pet's new best friend.

That's where Dogs Finding Dogs comes into action, a Baltimore-based group of volunteers who use their highly trained canines to track and locate lost pets. Formed just a year and a half ago, the non-profit organization currently consists of 11 tracking teams made up of handlers and their dedicated dogs. Teams respond to calls from Maryland, Washington, D. C., Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

"It started out as a fun little thing to do, and within a couple of months it exploded," says the group's founder, Anne Wills, who works on cases with her German shepherd/Labrador mix, Heidi.

Touting the slogan, "Our noses know where your pet goes," the dogs, which obtain certification from the National Tactical Police Dog Association, can pick up a scent in mere seconds. They've helped find 250 pets to date.

"All they need is a quick whiff," Wills explained.

Factors such as snow, rain, and time can affect the dogs' ability to follow an animal's tracks and while the dogs aren't always able to find a lost pet, they can almost always isolate the location of the pet.

Wills said the group receives 20 or more inquiries a week from frantic families who have lost a beloved pet.

One such family was Fayetteville couple Jaime and Sarah Boward. On Feb. 21, the couple was out running in Michaux State Forest with their Basenji, Mercury, when the dog took off. After logging many hours of searching and coming up empty handed, the Bowards decided to seek help. On Thursday, the DFD search team of Tamara McGann and her white German Shepherd, Sheba, was sent to help find the dog.

Sheba was able to track Mercury for several hours, and the Bowards believe she is currently in the mountains near Shippensburg and Miltonberger roads. Jaime said they plan to continue search efforts this weekend.

While Thursday's search did not end with the missing pooch back in her owners' arms, Jaime said he was pleased with the results.

"They were a really good company," he said the day after the search. "They got us in the general vicinity of Mercury and there was a sighting of her earlier in the day which helped, too."

Wills said that when an animal, especially a dog, is out in the wild for more than a few hours, it tends to resort back to its instincts and most of them won't even come to their owner if they see them.

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"We tend to humanize our animals; it's one of the biggest things people have difficulty understanding about their pets," she said.

"Imagine you were trying to catch a fox -- that's exactly what it's like trying to catch your dog."

Dogs Finding Dogs' services aren't just limited to other canines -- the group has also helped locate the whereabouts of missing cats, ferrets and even horses.

The group charges a \$150 donation, but that's only if a dog is used to track an animal, according to Wills. Many times the group is able to help pet owners find their animals by simply aiding with community awareness and contacting shelters. DFD also has a fund set up for those who cannot afford their services. Its main goal isn't to make money like other pet detective-type organizations, Wills said.

"That goes against our philosophy. We try to help as many people as possible; we're not trying to make a living off of it."

To learn more

For more information, visit <http://www.dogsfindingdogs.com> .

If you see her

Mercury is a brown and white Basenji. If you see her, call Jaime Boward at 816-8907.

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