

Finding Fido

Story by Karen Crafts Driscoll | Photography by Cory Donovan

THREE YEARS AGO, with her children grown, Catonsville native Anne Wills decided that maybe it was finally time for a dog.

She'd always admired German shepherds, and was soon united with a black ball of energy she named Heidi. Heidi was so energetic, in fact, that Anne's police-officer boyfriend persuaded her to take the hyper pup for professional training at Arrowwood Shepherds, a local agency with experience training police dogs.

It turned out that Heidi had a crazy nose; the dog was a born tracker.

While Heidi and Anne were training at Arrowwood, calls would occasionally come in about missing pets. Wesley Jensen, Arrowwood's owner, suggested that Anne take Heidi out on one of these calls.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Within about six months of Heidi's inaugural search, Anne quit her full-time job at a manufacturing firm, and the nonprofit Dogs Finding Dogs (DFD) was born.

Ever since, Anne and Heidi have been very, very busy ladies.

In three short years, DFD has grown to nine teams of volunteers. These owner/pet teams (many comprising dogs rescued from high-kill shelters) go out every day all over Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, and southern Pennsylvania to help reunite missing pets with frantic owners.

For a suggested flat donation of \$175, DFD will work with you until your pet is found or you decide to stop looking. Successful searches have been as quick as 30 seconds and as long as three months.

To date, DFD has made over a thousand successful recoveries, and not just of pooches. Heidi and her canine pals have also sniffed out missing ferrets, rabbits, cats, horses, and even an iguana or two.

What the dogs are able to do always leaves Anne feeling a little incredulous.

Recently, Heidi located two terrified kitties hiding in the charred remnants of their Crownsville home. The smell of

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smoke was so overwhelming that Anne could barely keep up with the dogs.

“To find a small animal in a destroyed mess of cinders, smoke, chemicals, water, and rubbish is mind-blowing,” she says. “I don't know how they do it.”

“And to be handed a scent article that reeks of smoke? I don't know how they can smell through it.”

And yet, working for nothing more than the reward of a thrown tennis ball, it seems Heidi can find pretty much anything.

The way Dogs Finding Dogs works is simple: If your pet goes missing, give Anne a call, the faster the better. Not only does DFD provide the services of dogs

that have been trained and certified by the National Tactical Police Dog Association, the full-service nonprofit also offers a wealth of information and advice.

And the donation-driven organization never turns away a case because of an owner's inability to pay.

For Anne, it's not about the money, anyway (although sometimes just paying the bills is a challenge). It's about the connection she shares with the people she helps.

“Every case, I end up crying with my clients, whether happy tears or sad,” she says. “I've seen the biggest, meanest-looking guys fall to their knees and cry because I got to hand their cat back to them. You just can't put a price tag on that.”

“There's no better feeling in the world.” ✨

For more information on Dogs Finding Dogs, visit www.dogsfindingdogs.com. And visit our blog for a first-hand account of a successful DFD mission, www.MarylandLife.com/blogs/around-Maryland.

