

ASPCA Dog of the Year: Pearl the shelter dog turned search and rescue dog

October 22, 2010

11:04 AM MST



Pearl is ASPCA's Dog of the Year for 2010 for her heroic efforts in Haiti
Photo Courtesy of National Disaster Search Dog Foundation

Pearl does it again. From shelter dog, to search and rescue dog, to heroine of the book, "A New Job for Pearl", and now the ultimate award **ASPCA Dog of the Year**. The later was announced this month. Captain Ron Horetski of the Los Angeles County Fire Department (Pearl's handler) and Pearl will go to New York on November 10th to be honored for Pearl's heroic deeds in saving earthquake victims in Haiti. As this year's recipient of the ASPCA's Dog of the Year, Pearl is one of seven outstanding animals and people to receive honors for 2010 from the ASPCA at their **Annual Humane Awards Luncheon** sponsored by **The Hartville Group**.

For Ron Horetski, the award is an honor especially since this is the first search and rescue dog to receive this award.

The story of this 3-year old Labrador Retriever, began when her owner of the time surrendered her to

a local shelter. Soon after volunteer Recruiter Penny Woodruff, while scouting for potential search dogs, discovered Pearl. Evaluating her as a high-strung, toy-crazy dog, Penny found that Pearl possessed the qualities needed for a search and rescue dog. Pearl exhibited intense drive, determination, boldness, athleticism and the ability to focus on any task given to her. Soon after Pearl was brought to the **National Disaster Search Dog Foundation** based in Ojai, Ca an organization dedicated to recruiting rescued dogs and partnering them with firefighters and other first responders to assist in finding people buried in the wreckage of disasters.

In July of 2008 after completing her formal training, Pearl was partnered with her handler, Ron Horetski. The two underwent training together to attain FEMA Certification, which occurred in May of 2009.

Ron and Pearl are part of the Los Angeles County Task Force 2, one of two task forces, the other in Fairfax, VA that cover local, national and international disasters. Each task force is made up of eight canines and handlers. Pearl is the youngest and only female of the canine teams in the Los Angeles.

What Ron Horetski finds amazing about Pearl is how fast she moves through a pile of rubble and her love and enthusiasm for this work. Pearl is very hyper and as a search and rescue dog she must be kept hyper. As Ron states, "The more hyper she is the better".

Pearl's heroic deeds along with those of the other SDF canine teams were not without challenges. What most people do not know about the devastation in Haiti was the abundance of wild animals and dogs creating distractions to the search and rescue canine teams. They were also carriers of unwanted diseases. Before a search could take place, the area had to be cleared of all wild animals and dogs in order to let the canine teams off-lead to perform their given tasks. Remarkably Pearl and her teammates could go 30-40 ft into an area searching and then come back out. After each days work the dogs would return to the embassy to be decontaminated and given a clear bill of health by a veterinarian in order to perform their job the next day.

For Ron and Pearl there is constant training to keep Pearl alert, fast and hyper. Training occurs once a week with the other canines of the Los Angeles County Fire Department. Quite often there is travel on a weekend for additional training or a simulation of a disaster.

When Pearl sees Ron grab his vest and equipment she knows it is time to do her job to help save others.

For Pearl search and rescue is her job, for us becoming aware of the importance of both search and rescue and how dogs play such an important part of our lives is vital.

As many of you already know 2nd graders at Rancho Romero School in Alamo, CA played a part in making Pearl's story known. Through their book, "**A New Job For Pearl**" they are hoping to raise money for the National Disaster Search Dog Foundation to train another search and rescue dog. They have currently raised \$7300 of the \$10,000 needed to train another dog. You can do your part by

helping them achieve their goal by clicking [here](#) to purchase their book.

To read more articles about Pearl by this author see below.

SUGGESTED LINKS

- **Shelter dog becomes search and rescue dog and heroine of a new book**



Cori Solomon

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