

# Broward Sheriff's bloodhounds search for the most vulnerable victims



BSO Deputy Kevin Bolling introduced the newest member of the sheriff's office search and rescue team, the bloodhound unit. The bloodhounds trained on Wednesday going over different search and rescue scenarios with their handlers.



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Sun Sentinel

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Broward Sheriff's bloodhound unit continues growing

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**H**olding onto a 15-foot leash, Broward Sheriff's Office Deputy Ashley Joy cheered on her bloodhound as it searched the ground, tracking one particular scent.

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...ounds from the sheriff's office put their

noses to the ground and immediately start trailing the scent of missing and endangered people.

Unlike other police dogs, who sniff out bombs, drugs, jail contraband and fugitives, the bloodhounds are on a mission to search the most vulnerable missing people — children, people with mental health issues and the elderly.

"Bloodhounds don't do any bite work, they are extremely friendly," said Deputy Kevin Bolling. "The dogs are used exclusively to find at-risk missing people, not criminals."

Bolling, a 34-year veteran of the agency, was the first and only member of the bloodhound unit for almost 15 years.

Then came brother and sister K-9s Wyatt and Macie, and their partners, Deputy Debra Wallace and Deputy Kelli Covet.

"The bloodhound unit was one person until three years ago, when Deputy Wallace and Deputy Covet came in," Bolling said. "They've been working three years and have had a lot of success with the bloodhounds."

His current dog, Suzie, is 10 years old. Bolling said they'll retire together in May.

"Most dogs retire at about 9 to 10 years old," he said. "She's had six very sad cases, but the majority of our cases have happy endings, when we could get to [the person] before something happens."

At the Plantation Equestrian Center on Wednesday, the three veteran bloodhounds trained with the newest members of the unit.

As Amber found sheriff's office Explorer Neal Williams, 19, who played the victim during the search-and-rescue scenarios, the other deputies cheered and rewarded the pup with treats.

"As a puppy, it's a game where they get praise and food rewards when they guess the right person," Bolling said. "They do what they do naturally because they are natural hunters, we're just teaching them to look for people."

After months of obedience training and acclimating to the noises and distractions she might encounter on the job, Amber is on her way to becoming a certified police dog by the National Police Bloodhound Association.

... year volunteering with the bloodhound unit

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"This specific position with the bloodhounds is very rewarding," she said. "When returning children to parents or any kind of loved one...the kind of gratitude you get is indescribable."

These floppy-eared K-9s have been at the forefront of major searches all over **Broward County**.

"We show up with the dogs, we take a scent article — a piece of clothing, a hairbrush, a toothbrush — something that's exclusive to that person and then we set the dog up and we trail them and all the resources start going that way. Our aviation unit and everyone can help find them quicker," Bolling said.

Most times, their search has a happy ending, but there are handful of cases that haunt the deputies in the search team.

Almost a year after 3-year-old Ahizya Osceola's body was discovered stuffed inside a box in the family's Hollywood residence, Covet still carries around a picture of him.

"I was the first one on scene," she said Wednesday, recalling the initial search mission when the boy was reported missing on March 19, 2015.

Covet and Macie got to work, trying to track the scent of the boy who authorities were told had "wandered out of the house," she said.

"We were not getting a trail," she said. "Macie would look up, like, 'I've got nothing.'"

In November, the bloodhound unit was called to track the scent of 18-month-old Vihaan Pullaamsetti, who had disappeared from a relative's home in Weston.

"The entire team goes out for anyone under 8 years old," Bolling said.

Within 30 minutes, the dogs led deputies to the canal, where the child's body was found, Bolling said.

More recently, the bloodhound unit helped in the initial search for 2-month-old Taraji Kemp, who was kidnapped during a home invasion outside Fort Lauderdale on Feb. 26.

"When we got there, we took a scent article, which was a onesie, socks, stuff from the baby," Bolling said. "We did a grid search for about three blocks to rule out the baby being in the area. When we ruled it out, the investigators were able to concentrate more on the kidnapping."

Taraji was found 17 hours later, strapped into a car seat inside an Orlando-area apartment more than 200 miles from home. She was returned safely to her mother.

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ut in the unit.

"When you bring the bloodhound out, you're looking for the kid and all you're thinking is, 'Please, please, let me find this kid,'" Joy said. "That's all that's going through your mind."

All the sheriff's office bloodhounds, starting with Bolling's first partner in 1998, were donated by the Jimmy Ryce Center, a foundation created by Don and Claudine Ryce, parents of the 10-year-old Miami-Dade boy who was abducted and killed in 1995.

"We have seen a dramatic increase in requests for bloodhounds from agencies around the country," said Mark Young, chairman of the foundation. "The bloodhound can do a lot of things that another canines cannot do."

Since its inception, the foundation has donated 600 bloodhounds to law enforcement agencies across the country to help find abducted and lost children.

Young said each puppy, which comes from a breeder, costs about \$1,000. Law enforcement agencies then budget for the dog's training, feeding and care.

When tracking missing children, the members of the bloodhound unit keep in mind they are saving somebody's Jimmy.

"The incident was a tragedy, but I really hope we do as much as we can to return kids or any loved one," Joy said.

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