

# 'Puppies' go pro

## State prison's first litter of drug-detection dogs is now on the job

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Maryland Division of Correction Sgt. Eric Kretzer and Cayman, his detection dog, search for drugs in a cell at Roxbury Correctional Institution. Inmates wait in handcuffs outside a cell while their cell is searched. *(Ric Dugan/Staff Photographer)*



Sgt. Eric Kretzer and Cayman search for drugs in lockers at the visitors center at RCI. *(Ric Dugan/Staff Photographer)*

Maj. Peter Anderson, Maryland Division of Correction K-9 Commander, talks about the success of the most recent class of graduates. One of the graduates, Cayman searches a cell for drugs with her handler Sgt. Eric Kretzer. *(Dustin Lawyer/Videographer)*

Cayman still had a puppy's energy and was as curious as ever, while she waited in the visitor area at Roxbury Correctional Institution for an opportunity to show the media how she works.

Those are good attributes for a dog trained to detect drugs such as heroin, cocaine and marijuana in a state prison complex that houses approximately 6,300 inmates.

Cayman is one of six dogs from the first litter of 12 black Labrador retrievers that were bred at the K-9 headquarters. The local breeding program began in 2006 in an attempt to cut costs and create a steady supply of high-quality drug-detection dogs in the face of a national increase in demand for detection dogs following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

On this late June day, Cayman was friendly (after all, you don't want her scaring visitors when she's sniffing them for drugs), sniffing her surroundings and pacing around eager to get to work.

With a cell's two inmates waiting in handcuffs outside, Cayman, led by her handler, Sgt. Eric Kretzer, entered the cinder-block room and sniffed the bedding, the toilet and lockers, standing on her rear legs with her front paws on a shelf to check out the top shelf in a locker.

Then Kretzer led Cayman back into the hallway where she sniffed the two inmates as they took turns sitting in a plastic chair.

Cayman didn't find anything on this go-round.

### **All in a day's work**

On an average work day, Kretzer said Cayman might check out 48 cells, 20 on a summer day due to the heat. She sniffs 50 to 150 visitors in one weekend, and she also checks common areas such as showers, laundry and recreation areas where an inmate might stash drugs so they cannot be directly linked back to him, according to Maj. Peter Anderson, K-9 commander for the Maryland Division of Correction.

If drugs are found on an inmate or in an area where they can be linked to a specific inmate, the inmate receives a notice of infraction and an administrative hearing is held to determine the punishment. The inmate might lose good conduct time or be moved to a single cell and lose liberties such as eating in the chow hall, Anderson said.

### **Effective detection**

Kretzer leads her around each cell two to three times because there's a lot to check. He rolls back the bottom bunk's mattress out of respect for the inmate so Cayman jumps on the bunk and not the mattress to sniff the upper bunk.

Anderson said because the cells are such tight areas - they are 6 feet by 9 feet - that often if there's any narcotics inside, the dog will detect the odor immediately. While each dog might have its own way of signaling drugs to its handler, this litter was trained to find where the odor is strongest and sit.

Since graduation, the puppies have made dozens of "finds" - the term Anderson uses to describe when one of the drug-detection dogs finds illegal drugs. A few of them made finds before graduation, as they got a head start on the job.

Since mid-March, the four dogs working at state prisons have 59 finds and nine visitor arrests, Anderson said.

Of their finds, 14 were narcotics and 45 were contraband such as shanks, tobacco and cell phones. The dog might signal the odor of drugs which are no longer present, but a search might turn up contraband.

Kretzer said sometimes a dog will detect the odor of drugs on a visitor, but the visitor doesn't consent to a search and leaves.

### **A successful program**

Overall, the program has been successful, financially and otherwise, Anderson said.

The cost of raising one puppy to 1 year old is estimated to be \$1,000 - including the cost of feeding, housing and caring for mom - compared with buying one dog for training for \$4,000 to \$6,000, Anderson said.

The breeding program is modeled after one at Auburn University. Auburn University has about an 85 percent success rate with puppies raised in a correctional facility by inmates, said John Pearce, director of training and operations for the college's Canine Detection Training Center. The success rate for puppies raised off-site by volunteers is about 25 percent. In both cases, the dogs were the result of select breeding.

So far the local program also has an 83-percent success rate - of the six puppies, one, Dora, washed out in late May. She just didn't have enough enthusiasm for the job, Anderson said. The sixth dog, Lexus, had to postpone the completion of her training until fall because she went into heat.

The verdict is still out on her.

Maj. Peter Anderson would like to see even "more octane" in the division's third litter of drug-detection dogs. That might mean picking a different daddy, one that shows more energy, he said.

Cayman was lagging behind her brothers and sisters in April 2007. She wasn't actively pursuing the drug-scented towel. So trainers would have Cayman and another puppy chase after the same towel to get Cayman's competitiveness going.

Their efforts have paid off and the trainers consider Cayman the top dog from her litter.

At the U.S. Police Canine Association trials in Berkeley Springs, W.Va., in April, Cayman tied for third among 60 dogs from Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, Washington, D.C. and Delaware, Kretzer said. During the trials, the dogs had to find narcotics hidden in rooms and vehicles. Each team was judged on the dog's and handler's performance.