

Tiger Paws

Three four-legged MU workers poised to make a difference

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Photos by Mark Barna, Tammy Hickman and Rob Hill

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As the dog days of summer come to an end, the University of Missouri welcomes three four-legged members to the campus community. Learn more about these furry new additions and how each through their professional training helps others and enriches Mizzou.

Brass, Explosives Detection K-9

Let's face it. How we act at work can be quite different from how we act at home. When at work, we are eager to accomplish what we are hired to do, while our time at home is often spent reenergizing and relaxing. Things are no different for a new University of Missouri Police Department officer. His name is Brass. And he's a K-9.

The 22-month-old German shepherd is friendly and approachable when not working, but as soon as his handler, MUPD Officer Joan Haaf, gives the command, Brass switches into work mode.

Brass earned explosives detection dog certification through the North American Police Working Dog Association (NAPWDA), and he is



Brass the MUPD K-9 has been trained to detect explosives. The German shepherd's handler is MUPD Officer Joan Haaf. Photo by Mark Barna.

the only explosives K-9 in Boone County, according to MUPD Maj. Brian Weimer. He joined the force in mid-August after completing six weeks of training at Shallow Creek Kennels in Sharpsville, Pennsylvania.

Brass will work with Haaf to patrol campus and sporting events, perform building sweeps and respond to bomb threats. The canine is trained to identify the scents of common materials used to make explosives. He performs a sitting action to notify Haaf when the scents are detected.

The dog's expertise isn't cheap. His training and upkeep while on the force will cost more than \$16,000, Weimer said.

But that's a pittance given the lives that might be saved through the canine's work.

Rhett, Professional Assistance Canine



Rhett, the professional assistant dog for children with autism at the Thompson Center, is trained to bring comfort to patients. Photo by Tammy Hickman.

During a recent counseling session at the MU Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders in east Columbia, a child with autism was having difficulty reading and had become frustrated. The clinician asked for assistance from a new staff member, Rhett.

Rhett works through animal-assisted therapy. With exceptional patience and temperament, the dog radiates unconditional love and a non-judgmental spirit toward the children.

The 2-year-old Labrador retriever started working at the center in May. As a facility dog, Rhett was trained like a service dog, but instead of working for a single person, he works at a facility to assist many people. Rhett is frequently used to calm children during lab procedures, such as when drawing blood. He can also help relax children performing a frustrating task.

In Rhett's presence, the child having trouble reading immediately relaxed, picked up a book and started reading to the animal.

Rhett can also demonstrate tasks to children. For children with special needs who are starting school, for example, Rhett teaches them classroom etiquette, such as pushing in their chair, which Rhett accomplishes with his nose. Rhett makes learning more fun.

The black Lab was brought to Mizzou through a collaboration between the Thompson Center and the MU Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction (ReCHAI), which works to educate and conduct programs and research about the benefits of human-animal interaction. Gretchen Carlisle, a ReCHAI post-doctoral fellow, led the effort to bring Rhett to MU. The MU Student Occupational Therapy Association donated \$600 to purchase Rhett's initial supplies.

Due to the high volume of patients at the Thompson Center, Rhett has more than one handler so that he can serve in both the center's medical and therapy services.

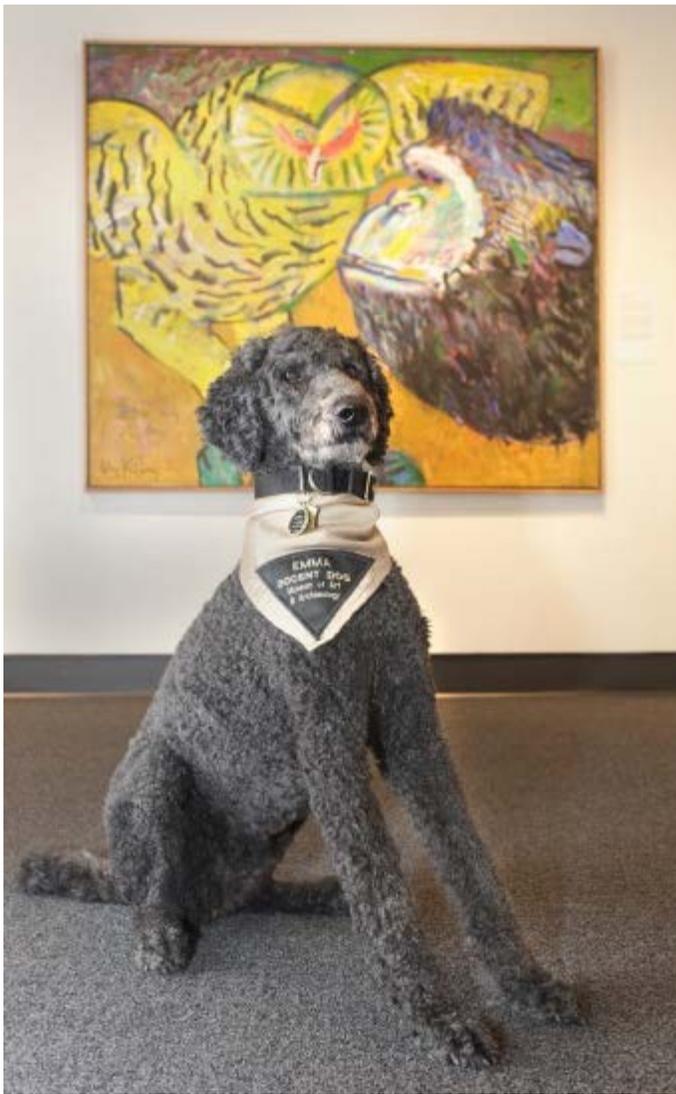
Rhett lives with his primary handler, Anna Hogg, a Thompson Center behavior analyst. The two other handlers are Krista Hughes, a registered nurse and the clinical services manager, and Tammy Hickman, a licensed practical nurse. Support Dogs Inc., an assistance dog organization in St. Louis, trained the handlers and Rhett. Identical dog commands are used by the handlers.

Support Dogs Inc. will provide ongoing training support for the handlers. "The use of a facility dog for children with autism requires special skills, so his integration into the Thompson Center will remain gradual," Carlisle said.

Emma, Docent Dog

For children taking the Docent Dog Tour at MU's Museum of Art and Archaeology at Mizzou North, the day is brightened by the smile of Emma, the official canine tour guide and ambassador for the museum. Emma shows her Mizzou pride through her black poodle fur and shiny gold bandanna.

Docents at the art and archaeology museum are trained volunteers who share knowledge about the art collections and exhibitions with museum visitors. Emma's owner and handler, Kathryn Lucas, has been a museum docent for five years. Emma received certification through the American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen award, which assures proper obedience and



Emma the Docent Dog at the Museum of Art and Archaeology calms children during tours, which some experts say helps children engage better with the displays. Emma also brings attention to animal-themed artwork. Behind Emma hangs Irving Kriesberg's painting "Oh, Joy! (Tokyo)," which depicts a gorilla and an owl. Photo by Rob Hill.

temperament. Emma has also earned certifications through Therapy Dogs International, MU's Pet Assisted Love and Support for Seniors program (PALSS) and the College of Veterinary Medicine's Pet Assisted Love and Support program (PALS).

Lucas uses Emma to model calming energy to the children. Before each tour, she introduces Emma to the children and teaches them how to approach the dog, encouraging them to move

slowly and speak softly. Children are free to gently stroke Emma's fur as they sit circled on the gallery floor discussing their favorite art pieces.

The children are asked to demonstrate the same calm energy during the tour, which tends to keep students from touching the displays.

"Studies in the field of cognitive psychology suggest that a positive, novel stimulus, like Emma, may increase visitors' emotional arousal," Lucas said. "The unexpected presence of Emma at the museum may enhance visitors' ability to retain the information shared with them on the tour."

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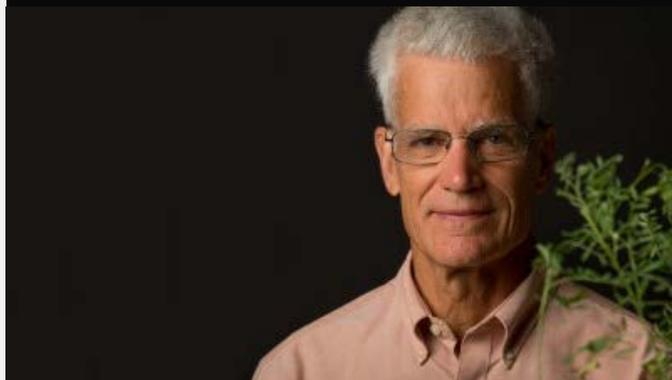


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