

Cadaver Dog Recognized for Service in Iraq

ASPCA to honor black Labrador Retriever with a humane award.

Posted: September 23, 2008, 5 a.m. EDT

Photos courtesy Jim McCansStache, a certified cadaver dog who lives in Havertown, Pa., with his handler Jim McCans is one of eight animals and people that will be honored for their heroic deeds at this year's Humane Awards Luncheon in New York City, hosted by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

After a nationwide call to the public for nominations in February, an ASPCA-appointed committee sifted through hundreds of entries and selected winners in eight categories, according to spokeswoman Emily Brand. Stache's story stood out above the rest because the 4-year-old black Lab has spent all his life performing successful searches and solving cases, Brand said.

With his training to find human remains and as a United States Police Canine Association-certified cadaver dog, Stache and McCans have worked in nearly two dozen searches, including a trip to Mississippi to find a Hurricane Katrina victim, and solving a missing-person case in Philadelphia. The dog received 12 weeks of full-time training at the Philadelphia Police Academy in the summer of 2005.

Within the past year, Stache and McCans provided assistance in Iraq, where the dog searched for missing American service men and women. The team found nine recoveries, and experienced a close brush with death when an IED, or Improvised Explosive Device, exploded in their path in Owasat, Iraq.

"It was a very risky mission for Stache and his handler, and we wanted to recognize Stache for his heroic efforts," Brand said.

Stache lost his hearing temporarily, but he has since recovered and returned home from Iraq. For his service, Stache was nominated for an ASPCA Humane Award by a friend of his handler.

As a winner, Stache will receive a special ASPCA Presidential Service Award nameplate and a free trip to New York City with the McCans family. The award will be presented to Stache on Oct. 30 at the Humane Awards Luncheon, at the Rainbow Room in Rockefeller Center, along with the other winners.

The list of winners also includes a 10-year-old cat named Libby, who served as a seeing-eye cat to a senior Lab-Shar Pei mix named Cashew, who was blind and deaf. The cat, selected as ASPCA Cat of the Year, helped her canine companion with daily tasks and guided the blind dog to her food.

The Dog of the Year is a 5-year-old black Lab-Golden Retriever mix named Ilia. The service dog has supported 10-year-old Cole Massie from Los Angeles, Calif., through medical treatments and physical therapy for his cerebral palsy.