

Dogs Awarded for Service and Companionship

Top dogs are honored for their contributions to society and receive \$1,000 along with engraved sterling silver collar medallion.

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Each year, the American Kennel Club (AKC) gives out Awards for Canine Excellence (ACE) to dogs who demonstrate outstanding service to society. The awards are granted in five categories: law enforcement, search and rescue, therapy, service, and exemplary companion dog.

The winners receive \$1,000 along with an engraved sterling silver collar medallion that will be presented to them at the AKC/Eukanuba National Championship in December.

The law enforcement award went to the Baton Rouge, La., police department's entire K9 unit. The team consists of nine German Shepherds and one Belgian Malinois. After Hurricane Katrina, the city's population swelled, crime spiked and the police force was stretched thin. The K9 unit helped Baton Rouge transition into a safer place to live, according to police department officials. The K9 unit will donate their prize money to St. Jude's Children Research Hospital.

"Usually only an individual dog is honored with the ACE, however in this unique situation we could not bring ourselves to single out only one hero," says Ronald Rella, AKC Director of Project Administration and member of the judging panel. "And therefore we were inspired to bestow the award upon this entire team of dogs."

Ranger from Shreveport, La., won in the search and rescue category. The Labrador Retriever has worked with the Shreveport Fire Department since 2001 and assists in search operations in Louisiana, Texas, and Arkansas.

Ten-year-old Penni, a Pembroke Welsh Corgi from New York won in the therapy dog category for her time spent visiting nursing homes, hospitals and schools since she was a puppy.

Holly, a Shetland Sheepdog from Utah who can predict when her owner is about to have a seizure, was declared the service dog winner. Together she and her owners educate others about the capabilities of service dogs as well as teach children about dog care.

The exemplary companion winner is Rumor, a Rottweiler from Nebraska. Rumor and her owner both came from challenging situations and met when a foster parent took them both in. They grew together and moved beyond their troubled pasts and are now involved in therapy work.

"All of our ACE nominees are truly deserving of recognition and choosing just one for each category is the hardest thing to do," Rella said. "Each nomination is a testimony to the loyalty, devotion and strength dogs give us."