Hi! I’m Hunter. I’m a Search and Rescue Dog - SAR Dog for short. My job is to find people who are lost - that’s not an easy job.

It takes a lot of special training to be a SAR Dog. Not just any dog can join in the search. We have to train with our handlers for a long time. Sometimes it can take almost two years of training before we can join in a search and rescue. I started my training when I was just 8 weeks old.

For starters, every SAR Dog has to be a Canine Good Citizen. That means we have to be obedient at all times and must get along with other dogs, handlers and people we meet like in the picture - Uffda is making a new friend.

We even have to be good to other critters! That’s just a part of it. There’s much more to search and rescue than just being friendly.

SAR Dogs must stay in good shape to climb, run and jump. I was taught how to retrieve things for my handler, even in water. I had to learn how to stay in cars and vans for a long time with people and other dogs. Most of all, I learned to search properly using my nose and how to signal my handler when I picked up a scent.

Finally, I was an official SAR Dog and got our official team badges. JCSDA calls them our accountability tags. Bob and I became part of the Search and Rescue Team.
Bloodhounds, Newfoundlands, Labrador Retrievers, German Shepherds, Australian Shepherds, Rottweilers and mixed breeds make great SAR Dogs. Other breeds like Border Collies, Boxers, Corgis, Dobermans, Golden Retrievers, Labradoodles (that’s a Labrador and a Poodle mix), Malinois, Schnauzers, Tervuren, Australian Cattle Dogs and even Poodles can do great work, too! Dogs with traits for sporting, working and herding are the top picks. Of course our temperament - that’s the way we act - is more important than our breed.

You might be wondering, "What kind of dog is Hunter?" I’m a Bulldog and Chocolate Labrador Retriever Mix! I’ve got lots of spirit and energy to do my job and that’s really important, but just like my handler Bob, I also have to be calm in stressful and changing situations. We SAR Dogs also have to be agile, adaptable and can’t be afraid of loud noises.
All About Search and Rescue Dogs

Just like people, we SAR Dogs have different skills. Some of us dogs are best at one thing, while other dogs are good at several things.

Sometimes our skills depend on our breed, but the skill all canines have is our sharp sense of smell. That’s what makes us dogs an important part of the Search and Rescue Team.

I’m trained as an Air Scent Dog. You can see me sniffing the air in this picture. Lots of people think we sniff the ground to find people, but we actually smell the air for a human scent. Here’s how we do it.

Kind of like the way dogs shed hair, people shed skin cells. The bigger cells fall to the ground and the smaller particles float in the air. Even though a microscope is needed to see these cells, dogs can smell them. Our noses can be up to 10,000 times better than humans!

When looking for a lost person I follow the scent of any human, not just a particular person. That’s why Air Scent Dogs work best in large parks or private lands that are closed off and have no other people around. The best times and conditions for our searches are early mornings or late afternoons on cool, cloudy days when there is a light wind.

Of course there are dogs that sniff the ground, too. They are Trailing Dogs, sometimes also called Tracking Dogs. They work at a fast pace and follow the scent of the lost person... and once they pick up that trail, they just keep on going.

Trailing Dogs need to smell something belonging to that person, like a shirt, socks or a hat. When they know the scent, they look for just that smell. Their nose is used to find the exact scent, much like you would use your eyes to find a red crayon in a box of different color crayons.

Trailing Dogs give both negative and positive responses along the scent trail. Negative responses tell the handler the scent isn’t as strong or it is gone. Positive responses mean the dog found the trail and is working it.

Another search and rescue canine skill is the Water Search Dog, like Uffda. She’s a bloodhound. Looking for drowning victims, Water Search Dogs work along the shore and in boats to locate the scent as it rises through the water.

On this mission, Uffda is at the front of the boat, leans closer and closer to the water and then slaps and bites at the surface when a person underwater is found. Uffda’s handler, Paul, then drops a marker into the water and the boat returns to shore. Divers return to where the marker is to locate the drowned victim.
I'm also trained as a Human Remains Detection Dog or HRD Dog. For this task I find those no longer alive and people’s remains. Some people die in disasters like when tornadoes cause buildings to collapse. Sometimes fires take lives. Families want to know what happened to their loved ones and the skills of these dogs can help find them. HRD Dogs are trained to detect the body's scent rising from the soil, the same way dogs find where they buried a bone.

We HRD Dogs can find very small parts or even blood and may work above or below ground.

Frequently we are called upon used after disasters like tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes or wildfires to detect human remains through concrete or underground. HRD Dogs and their handlers worked long hours searching for victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana. HRD Dogs are sometimes also called Cadaver Dogs.

The final skilled canine is the Avalanche Dog. We don't have any of these dogs in Kentucky, but in areas where skiing is a big sport, these dogs are important. They search for people who are trapped under the snow. Avalanche Dogs can find someone under as much as 15 feet of snow.

I hope you enjoyed me telling you all about Search and Rescue Dogs and the important training and work we do.

If you want to know more about my team and me, visit our website at JCSDA.com and look around. We also have a Kids Area – you'll find me there – with this story, pictures, games, activities all about search dogs and the team. There’s more about me there, too! I hope to see you there! ~Hunter