

Beloved County Sheriff Department K-9 Sari Is Retiring From Active Duty

By Joe Leicht

THE INDEPENDENT

The heroes of law enforcement come in all shapes and sizes, from the men and women in uniform to the K-9 dogs who serve alongside them.

But whether they have two legs or four, they all work toward one goal – to protect and serve the people of their communities.

Though she's only 13, one beloved member of the Monroe County Sheriff's Department will soon be retiring, passing the torch to younger generations of K-9s.

Sari, the German Shepherd assigned to Lt. Jim Lansing, will retire Aug. 1, 2015.

"I was going to work her till the end of the year but with her slowing down, I want to retire her on August 1, and that will give her exactly 10 years," Lansing said.

Though she's as adorable as any pup, Sari isn't your average Monroe County house dog. Born on Oct. 9, 2002 in Budapest, Hungary, Sari responds to commands in her native "tongue" of Hungarian.

She spent her "puphood" as a family dog in Hungary before she came to the United States on April 5, 2005. She trained at the Rudy Drexler School for Dogs in Elkhart, Ind., where she met Lansing, the Monroe County Sheriff's deputy who would become her partner.

At Drexler, Sari received extensive training in handler protection, narcotics, tracking, obedience and building searching. Together, Sari and Lansing earned their K-9 certification there on July 29, 2005.

Then-Sheriff Dan Kelley introduced Sari as the Monroe County Sheriff's Department Police Patrol Dog on Aug. 1, 2005. She became the second K-9 with the department. The first was Dyk, a K-9 assigned to retired deputy Robert Young.

Sari has spent the last 10 years working alongside Lansing, assisting him in everything from routine pa-

trol stops. She has successfully tracked lost children and adults, sometimes reminding Lansing that he had to "trust his dog" instead of his own instincts.

Over the years, she's been on the scene of some high profile cases, including the Coleman murders in Columbia and the Baxmeyer drownings.

Drug searches were common work for Sari, and in May 2011, she uncovered 65 pounds of cannabis on a traffic stop on Interstate 255. That was the biggest bust of her career.

But no matter what work she was doing, Sari's most important role was to be obedient to Lansing.

"Obedience is everything," Lansing said. "She had to be obedient 110 percent."

That makes sense for a dog that sometimes went from sniffing narcotics at a crime scene to entertaining children at a school presentation in the same week.

"She has a great temperament," Lansing said. "Everybody in the county knows Sari. She's done 54 organized demos and that's not counting the kids standing outside of McDonald's or the Cub Scout troops."

Because she is so good with kids, Sari will still be hanging around the sheriff's department after she retires. She'll do a great job of public relations for the department, greeting kids when they come in for tours.

That is, if she's not too busy sleeping in her favorite spot – under the mounted turkey in Sheriff Neal Rohlfing's office.

In retirement, Sari will simply spend more time at her other job – serving as the family pet in the Lansing household.

"She's not only a pet, she's part of the family," Lansing says.

Once she is retired, Lansing will take over paying for Sari's vet bills, food and expenses.

When the K-9 patrol dogs are "on the payroll" all the vet bills, dog food and other ex-

penses come out of the sheriff's department asset forfeiture fund, which is money seized from narcotics traffickers, Rohlfing said.

Earlier this year, a grant from the Howard Buffet Foundation and money from another private donor provided the department with two additional K-9 dogs, plus the training, the equipment and a Tahoe.

Deputy Ed Ahne was partnered with Kondor and Deputy Justin Mendenhall was partnered with Reggie.

"We will have complete coverage every day because they work opposite shifts. Most working dogs only work from 2 to 8 years, and Sari's going to be 13," Rohlfing said. "We've been fortunate to have the extra couple of years."

Monroe County is extremely fortunate to have K-9s on our force continually, particularly in our rural environment, Rohlfing said.

"It's not only the law enforcement element – the narcotics and going out and tracking people – it's also a great public relations tool with kids and schools and getting people to see the different tools in our basket that we have," Rohlfing said. "There's a lot that goes into it. They're just an invaluable resource that can help a rural county like us."

Though Lansing doesn't plan to get another K-9 dog as a partner, his years of experience certainly won't go unused. As chief deputy and patrol commander, part of his responsibilities will be to oversee the K-9 unit, allowing him to pass on his knowledge to Ahne and Mendenhall.

"I'm going to miss being a K-9 officer, but the two guys that are taking over and the two dogs are going to do a great job," Lansing said. "One of the things about being a K-9 officer is it is the most dedicated job. When a deputy goes home he's off, he's done until his next shift, but when you go home and you're a K-9 officer you're still on because you're responsible for a \$12,000 dog."



Lt. Jim Lansing and K-9 Sari.

Because Sari's main job was to protect Lansing, she was with him 24 hours a day, seven days a week for much of the time. Naturally, she suffered from separation anxiety if they spent much time apart.

So Lansing's family has taken Sari with them on vacations to places like Disneyworld and Chicago, making arrangements with hotels wherever they went.

Lansing doesn't seem to mind. After all, she's part of his family.

"They say the dog takes the personality of the handler," Lansing said.

Sari and Lansing are active members of the East-West K-9 Association, a training organization of local law enforcement officers and their K-9 partners.

NAUMANN WOODWORK

112 W. Whitefield, Columbia, IL
618-281-5077

Quality • Service • Price • Since 1984

New Kitchens, Cabinet Refacing, Bars,
Entertainment Centers,
Home Offices, Laundry Rooms,
Cambria Solid Surface & Laminate
Counter Tops, High Definition Laminates

We Handle It All From Start To Finish
Great Place For Do-It-Yourselfers
—Over 50 Years Of Craftsmanship—

