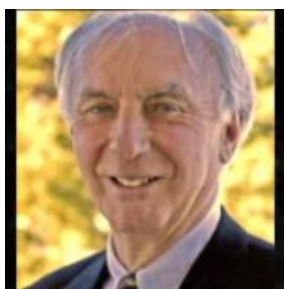


# Dogs provide deputies with another tool

By Ted Long

This week's Sheriff's Citizens Academy was a presentation by the K-9 unit. Two K-9 officers brought their dogs and all the equipment that they use working with them. The presentation featured a demonstration of the dogs apprehending a suspect and a drug search.

The dogs were born and bred in Germany, which seems to be law enforcement's first choice for dogs. The dog is purchased and owned by the handler and typically when the dog retires in eight to 10 years the handler is rotated out of the K-9 unit and another officer comes in.



Ted Long

The use of a dog is a matter to be taken seriously. The dogs are bred and trained to bite. That is to say, if the dog is let loose, he will bite you and bite you hard. There are rules and guidelines about when a dog can be used. They are motivated by the general "use of force" principles – the severity of the crime, the threat of violence by the offender and the use of alternative methods.

For example, a violent crime suspect in a building fleeing from capture would be a good opportunity to use a dog. The officer is required to give warning that the dog will be let

free, prior to releasing the dog.

The question came up about language: What if the suspect does not speak English? There is no requirement to know what language the suspect might speak and the officers reported that because the dog makes so much noise prior to release it is difficult to not know what is about to happen.

The presence of the dog is a threatening experience and it is easy to see that it would be a useful tool in gaining cooperation. The dogs are often used in this manner. They can calm a situation.

There is a K-9 on duty for each shift and is often called in to back up an officer.

The dog lives with the handler who has the ultimate decision on the use of the dog. Both officers like the fact that while they have ownership and control of the dog, it has meant additional expense for them. It also has given them the rights over the dogs' use. One got a clear sense of the handlers' close relationship to the dogs and their genuine concern for the dogs' well being

Like the use of a gun, use of a dog requires careful supervision and an effective review as a deterrent to abuse.

I commented on the fact that we often hear about administrative reviews of the use of shootings by police, but I have never heard of a case concerning the use of a dog. I do believe this speaks well of their use. I suspect it has a lot to do more with the relationship the officer has with the dog as compared to that of his gun.

*Ted Long is a South Lake Tahoe resident participating in the El Dorado County Sheriff's Citizens Academy.*