

# An officer and his canine companion:

## Risking life and paw to protect

BY KIRSTIANN CLIFFORD

### You'll never see one without the other.

Whether tracking a fleeing crime suspect at 3 a.m. or spending a quiet night at home with family, UTMB Police Canine Officer Wesley Braunsdorf and his four-legged partner, Noey, go everywhere together.

"I'm with Noey more than I'm with my family," said Braunsdorf, who is married and has a 9-year-old daughter and two other dogs at home. "It's an interesting dynamic."

Growing up with dogs, Braunsdorf said it was a "dream come true" when he was selected as UTMB's first canine officer three years ago. Since then, Noey and Braunsdorf have completed extensive training and certifications to help them protect UTMB and the greater community.

As one of a few police dogs in Galveston County trained to sniff out explosives, Noey is often called upon to help partnering law enforcement agencies.

"Pretty much every bomb threat or suspicious package, one of us is getting a phone call," said Braunsdorf. "If it's a school and the area is really large, we'll tag-team it with another canine officer to knock it out quickly. Noey is patrol-certified, too, so she does tracking and apprehensions. Sometimes, we'll get a call in the middle of the night to help the Galveston Police Department find a suspect. Or they are running a high-risk warrant and in case someone runs out the back, we'll hold perimeter."

Noey and Braunsdorf have even helped the Galveston PD successfully capture two murder suspects after a drug deal went bad.

"GPD set up a good perimeter and we tracked the suspects from yard to yard until they bailed and got in a vehicle—then we stopped them a block away," said Braunsdorf. "If Noey hadn't been there to track them, they probably would have been able to hide."



A Belgian Malinois, Noey's breed is a premier dog for law enforcement because it excels at patrol work, tracking and explosives detection. The training never stops—every day, the duo will do something, whether it's obedience or patrol work. Along with UTMB's newest canine, Jay, who joined the force in February, they meet up with other canine officers from around the region regularly to go over different scenarios.



UTMB Police Canine Officer Wesley Braunsdorf and his partner, Noey.

To Noey, it's a game. When she successfully alerts Braunsdorf to the scent of an explosive, she will receive her favorite reward, a tug toy. But game or not, Noey can be an intimidating addition to the police team. Hearing her bark from inside the police SUV can be enough for criminals to willingly give themselves up.

"I don't see how anyone would run from a police dog," said UTMB Police Lt. Ryan Erwin, who volunteered to wear a padded bite suit for one of Noey's training sessions. "When she tagged me, I could just feel the pressure of her teeth. You never get used to it."

The bond between Noey and Braunsdorf is evident when you watch them working together—and Noey does everything she can to protect him, whether in training or real life. It's a dangerous but important job that requires a strong relationship between officer and canine, forged over countless hours of training, working and living together.

"I enjoy helping people and the adrenaline rush that comes with it," said Braunsdorf. "For us to be able to either squash a threat or identify it immediately benefits everyone." ■