

North Carolina K9 Emergency Rescue Team

by Valerie Broadway

This column was in the works before Hurricane Florence existed, but she is just the kind of disaster that could call for the work of the North Carolina K9 Emergency Response Team (NCK9ERT). I interviewed Melisa Seminov, a Chatham resident who has been involved with NCK9ERT for 15 years.

NC K9 Emergency Response Team was organized in 1999 as a non-profit serving North Carolina and the surrounding areas. The organization provides highly skilled search teams which are available 24 hours a day. They respond to requests from Law Enforcement agencies during natural or manmade disasters, drowning, and lost or missing persons in urban or wilderness settings. Every member of NCK9ERT is a volunteer, and there is no cost for their services.

One canine response team is as effective as 20-30 human-only searchers. Dogs are trained



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for one of two purposes, to either “trail/track” or to “search”. Trailing/tracking dogs follow the trail a human has taken using a scent article from the person. Dogs usually work on long leashes and can follow scents up to 36 hours old. Search dogs, sometimes called cadaver dogs, find any human scent in a large area. They usually work off-leash.

Volunteers with NCK9ERT work with their personal dogs. Training for handler/dog teams is rigorous and must meet strict standards before they are deployed on a mission. Maintaining skills at an optimal level requires at least 50 hours per month of training and continuing education. Training is a combination of classroom, first aid, and in-the-field work. Beyond the dog training side of certification there are many other types of training a handler can complete. Additional training courses Melisa has completed includes, CPR, Ham radio license, Haz-Mat Awareness, Crime Scene Preservation, K9 First Aid, and Emergency Vehicle Driver. It takes most teams 18–24 months to become fully certified as a search dog/handler team.

Melisa's interest in search dog work began after taking her dog at the time to a few “just

for fun” Search and Rescue (nose-work/scent-work) classes in Raleigh with dog trainer Donnie Hult (www.dogtrainingcampusa.com.) She enjoyed the classes so much she decided to take the next step, which was a class in Apex called Fundamentals of Search and Rescue led by instructor, Mac Morgan, Chief of NCK9ERT.

Dogs from working bloodlines with higher than average drive and intensity are best suited for search and rescue. Melisa has always trained using her German Shepherd Dogs. Melisa and her dog at the time, Mick, were one of the first operational search dog teams in NC to earn a National certification through NASAR (National Association for Search and Rescue.) Melisa's current operational dog, 2-year-old Chico, is certified with NASAR as an HRD (Human Remains Detection) Land Type III dog.

For Melisa the rewards are both broad and personal. She states, “I have always liked helping people who needed help, so that part was easy. Helping to find missing people when other efforts had ceased gives comfort to those whose loved ones are missing. I hesitate to use the word closure, and much prefer resolution, because I don't believe there ever is closure in

the heart.” Melisa adds, “On a more personal level, I love working with dogs, and love the training of the dogs and myself. So, search offers me the opportunity to perform a service for the community with my dogs.” Melisa adds, “Every missing person is someone's child, parent, sibling, aunt/uncle, or cousin.”

Search work has taken Melisa to many parts of NC and areas throughout the southeast. She says, “My dogs and I have searched in all types of terrain and conditions. Often the conditions dictate the amount of time a dog is able to work; excessive heat being a big determining factor. NCK9ERT responds to requests from Law Enforcement and Emergency Management at no charge to the requesting agency. We have worked for agencies throughout the southeast, including the F.B.I.”

Melisa wants people to know the K9 Emergency Response Team is made up of dedicated hard-working, hard-training, always learning individuals who put the mission first and foremost. She adds, “In addition to our K9 teams we have sonar capabilities with an Edgetech side scan sonar, a small remote controlled boat (for small ponds/water) and an underwater drone. We are always open to people with sonar knowledge and experience to join forces with us.”

K9 Search teams spend about 50 hours a month on actual searches, working in up to 12 hour shifts. Volunteer searchers invest in the purchase of their personal equipment. They typically pay for their own training costs, as well as, their gas and food when out on a search.

Donations to keep the teams going are always needed, and greatly appreciated. NCK9ERT operations receives no state or federal governmental funding. Support comes completely from donations and the occasional grant. Otherwise, expenses are paid out of the pockets of the volunteers.

To donate, find out other ways to support the organization, or learn more, go to their website at www.nck9ert.org.

Valerie Broadway, the Canine Coach, is a dog trainer and behavioral specialist. For more information, call 919-542-4726 or visit www.caninecoachingservices.com.

What's Happening at Chatham Park?



New Road to Northwood High School

In August, we began clearing for a second road that will connect Northwood High School to 15-501. The existing road into the High School connects to Penguin Place on the east side of 15-501, and ultimately, the lower half of Mosaic. The additional road, approximately ¼ mile north, will connect to the upper half of Mosaic.

“The new access/exit road at Northwood High School will be a great help in regard to managing school traffic both internally and on Highway 15-501. We are excited about our partnership with Chatham Park and look forward to working together in the future to meet the needs of Chatham County Schools students.”—Dr. Derrick D. Jordan, Superintendent and Chris Blice, Chief Operations Officer, Chatham County Schools.

Completion of the new road is expected in the Summer of 2019.



Penguin Place now 100% Leased

Developer Ron Strom shared with us that restaurants and businesses at Penguin Place will continue to open over the balance of 2018. “We are very pleased with the mix of food and businesses that have chosen to be the early adopters at Chatham Park and occupy space within Penguin Place,” he said. “House of Hops and The Root Cellar share a large, shaded outdoor area where customers enjoy food and drink from both businesses. The Root Cellar, House of Hops, New View Eyecare, Mi Cancun and our residential real estate office occupy 75% of our space. All are independent and locally-owned by families living in or near Pittsboro.” The following tenants will make up Penguin Place: The Root Cellar; Marco's Pizza; Mi Cancun; The Nationwide Seagroves Agency; NewView Eye Care; Edward Jones, and Regional Real Estate Office.



Solar Farm Development Underway

North Carolina is fast becoming a national leader in the clean energy industry —creating new jobs, producing innovative new technology, and enriching the likes of communities like Chatham County.

In Chatham Park, we've partnered with Strata Solar, LLC, headquartered in Chatham County, to build an array of solar panels on 50 acres of land. This 5 megawatt solar farm would power an estimated 750 to 800 homes once completed.

Strata Solar's development manager, Sam Judd, expressed his excitement surrounding the Chatham Park partnership, “We are very excited to partner with Chatham Park on this project and to ensure a cleaner energy future for the community.”