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Tessa, the new Lake Elsinore Station K-9, attacks Cecilia Williford of the Palos Verdes Estates Police Department during a training exercise in Riverside. Tessa's handler is sheriff's Deputy Kari Cranfill.

DOG HELPS GET THE BAD GUYS

BY SARAH BURGE
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Lake Elsinore Station's newest four-legged crime fighter will soon be hitting the streets.

Tessa — a 2½-year-old Belgian malinois — is in training this month along with her handler, Deputy Kari Cranfill.

This is all new to Tessa, but Cranfill, 32, was already working as one of a dozen K9 patrol deputies with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department and is the only handler at the Lake Elsinore Station.

While Cranfill said she and the new dog are working well together, the match came about under sad circumstances.

Cranfill's first dog, Abel, a 4-year-old Belgian malinois that she had been working with since January 2009, became ill from an unexplained infection. After being sick for weeks, he had to be euthanized earlier this year.

"It was really difficult," Cranfill said. "We spend every day of every week doing something with the dog."

Cranfill said she had expected to work with Abel for about eight years and to keep him as a pet after he retired.

"It made me realize how attached I was," she said, "even though we're kind of told sometimes 'Don't get so attached.'"

"That dog had my back."

Cranfill, who has been with the department six years, said she had wanted to be a handler ever since she encountered a K9 team at a job fair in high school.



Tessa leaps from the water tank with Cranfill after cooling off after training at Adlerhorst International K-9 Academy in Riverside.

best job in the world," she said.

On Wednesday morning, Cranfill shouted commands in Dutch to Tessa, ordering her to chase down fellow handlers posing as bad guys at Adlerhorst International Police K-9 Academy near Riverside.

It looked like a canine obedience school run amok, with dogs snarling, barking and pulling wildly at their leashes.

But these canines, of course, aren't supposed to be docile pets. Getting the bad guys is what these dogs do.

The six-week K-9 academy refines the dogs' skills and trains the handler and dog to work together, said academy owner David Reaver, who has operated the Glen Avon facility for 35 years.

ment's patrol dogs are trained to find people, narcotics and evidence — as well as to bite.

Usually, though, the dogs don't have to sink their teeth into anyone.

"Most people, they hear the dog or they see the dog and they give up," Cranfill said.

The dogs are used more for their noses than anything else, she said.

The sheriff's department also purchased Tessa from the academy, which imports dogs from various breeders in Europe. Tessa was born in Holland and received much of her training there.

"She is extremely playful. She seems to love to work," Cranfill said. "I can't find any flaws at the moment."

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