

Yes . . . and no. The old maxim that "ya' can't teach an old dog new tricks," just ain't so. Any SAR organization that understands the "Laws of Learning" and has a good system of SAR dog training should be able to put a solid SAR foundation on any dog, young or old, that has the drives appropriate for the work. In fact, SAR training sometimes moves quicker with an older dog than it does with a puppy whose ability to focus and whose limited strength and coordination have to be factored into early training sessions. Additionally, older dogs who have in place an established reward system, and who have a good handler/dog communication system, and who understand the learning process and are not threatened by the demands of learning something new (ie, the dog "loves to learn"), can move very quickly through the initial foundational SAR training (although a dog will become "solid" and will "generalize" only after many, many, many hours of training and proofing). And so, it is very possible for older dogs to learn "how to be a SAR dog" and, in fact, some of us at MACRT started our SAR-careers with the dogs that we "just happened to have at the end of our leashes." Often these were dogs that were older and already had a successful previous career or two. Or, they were younger dogs that were just "sitting around at home" and "we wanted to give them something to do." Some of these dogs turned out to be "super" SAR dogs . . . but not all of them did and, while these dogs may have been wonderful in other canine-training environments, they just did not have the drives appropriate for SAR. Or, because of the age at which these dogs started, the dogs were near retirement by the time they became operational. Despite their "shortcomings," each of these dogs taught us a great deal during the years that we were starting out -- and it truly can be said that that dogs which are "training-challenges" teach one more about how to train a dog than do the dogs that just come out and "naturally" do whatever it is that we want them to do. So, all of us at MACRT have benefited working dogs that others would consider marginal. And, we each understand the "first-dog-syndrome" that makes new handlers want to work with their much loved pet, or former working dog. However, MACRT canine handlers also have developed over the years and MACRT now encourages new trainees to start out with a young dog or puppy with a strong aptitude for SAR for several important reasons:

- Most dogs can learn to do adequate SAR work but the dogs with drives appropriate for the work make great SAR dogs. And, while there is NO perfect dog, each of us at MACRT has seen the brilliant dog work. We have all seen the rubble dog that sails over the tough, voidy concrete piles and easily targets in and alerts on primary scent. We have all seen the bold, far-ranging wilderness dog that independently locks on a scent plume and zigzags along its edges until it finally arrows down the middle to the hidden subject. We have all seen the beauty and power of the driven, trained SAR dog and know the joy of working with such dogs. We want you to have the joy of working such a dog too and so we will be honest in our assessment of your dog.

- **Younger dogs or puppies will likely not have acquired unsuitable habits or behaviors that may have to be untrained (and prior bad imprinting is the number one reason that some older dogs are not successful, despite intensive re-tooling). And, it is often easier to imprint desirable behaviors into a puppy than into an older dog. When one purchases a puppy, however, one is never certain of "how that puppy will turn out as an adult" and whether that puppy will have the drives appropriate for this work. Some handlers avoid this problem by purchasing an animal that is 1 to 1 1/2 years old -- that way the drives of the particular dog can be evaluated instead of "waiting" to see if that "special puppy" grows up to have the drives. Whichever route you select, we encourage you to start your SAR career with a young dog or puppy that is truly "raising its paw" for the type of SAR work you want to do.**
- **MACRT puts tremendous resources and commitment into the training of each SAR dog on its roster. However, we are all volunteers with family obligations and work demands that impact the time which MACRT handlers have available to work with the many people that seek us out each year. Therefore, MACRT needs to maximize its resources by working with those dogs which we think will be solid performers at the end of its training. And, while we all might want to work with every dog that comes to one of our trainings, MACRT needs to be selective. As harsh as this sounds, MACRT is not a "dog training club." We do not charge for our services and we do not train people "just" to train people "how to do SAR." Rather, we are a volunteer organization which is committed to training people who will become our team members and who will be a valuable SAR resources in the event of a search emergency involving a lost or missing person. And, we will put enormous effort in to helping you become such a valuable public asset.**
- **Finally, we will be selective and we will encourage you to select a dog with drives appropriate for the work because we firmly believe that "the victim deserves more than adequate." A search for a missing person is a true emergency and finding that person quickly can mean the difference of life . . . and death for that person. We at MACRT believe that you honor all missing and lost people by only working with dogs with the drives appropriate for the work. And, because of the time MACRT invests in you and your dog, you honor MACRT by beginning training with a young dog or puppy with drives appropriate for the work in order to maximize the chance of that dog having a long and successful working career with MACRT.**