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## ‘An Excellent Nose’: Nebula is UM’s Newest K-9 Cop

**Black Labrador retriever trained to find weapons and explosives, keep campus safe**

SEPTEMBER 30, 2019 BY MICHAEL NEWSOM



Nebula, the University of Mississippi’s new police dog, searches Vaught-Hemingway Stadium and the football facilities ahead of a recent football game. The Labrador retriever is trained to find weapons, explosives and other threats. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

OXFORD, Miss. – During her training, Nebula, the **University of Mississippi**’s newest police dog, sniffed out a single grain of gunpowder in a massive warehouse, impressing both her handler and the U.S. **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms** agents training her.

Nebula came to **UPD** recently as part of a mutual aid agreement. The 18-month old black Labrador retriever, and her handler, UPD officer Brent Warner, were trained together at an ATF center in Virginia. She is UPD’s first dog trained to find explosives, weapons and other threats, while UPD’s other K-9, Dios, is trained to find narcotics.

UPD Chief Ray Hawkins believes Nebula will help the department with its goal of giving UM the safest campus imaginable.

“Nebula will be used locally and by the ATF for explosive searches for special events and investigations,” Hawkins said. “We have never had an explosive K-9 and in today’s climate, we feel having Nebula will give us a different, but much needed, security resource. We are excited about having Nebula to help keep our community safe.”

And that safety will be possible thanks to Nebula’s keen sense of smell, which Warner said is impressive.

“If it’s there, she’ll find it,” Warner said. “She has an excellent nose.”

At the ATF training, Warner recalls Nebula scanning a large warehouse for explosives. Trainers had been placing black powder inside it to see if the dog could find it, but they had spilled a single grain of it in another area.

“She walked by and stuck her nose to the ground and sat down,” Warner said. “She just looks at me, and I’m wondering what’s going on and thinking there’s nothing around.”

“Then there was this little black speck, like the size of a grain of coarse black pepper, and she hit on it.”

But it wasn’t always success and rewards in the form of treats for Nebula. Originally, the purebred lab

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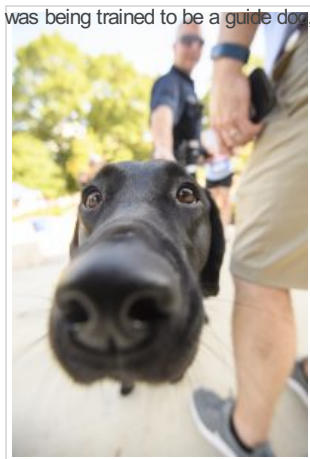
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**UPD officer Brent Warner works with his partner, Nebula, at a Welcome Week 2019 event. The 18-month-old Labrador retriever is trained to sniff out explosives and other threats. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services**

but her handlers quickly realized she was a little too active for that job. She washed out of the program, but for good reason.

It was determined she had the drive and the inquisitive nature that would make her perfect for police work. From there, she was taken into the ATF program and quickly earned high marks, thanks to her sniffing prowess.

Firearms, shells, shell fragments and almost any compound used to make explosives are among the threats she is trained to detect. She can easily find gunpowder, dynamite, ammonium nitrate and other common explosives, from some of the more easily available ones, such as the fireworks powder used in pressure cooker-type explosive devices, to more common, but extremely volatile chemicals, such as peroxide.

“She can detect any of 18,000 different combinations,” Warner said. “She can hit on anything from ammonium nitrate to fireworks powder. That is a wide of swath of materials, including some things you wouldn’t even think about as an explosive.”

During her training, she was searching a field and ran toward a tree. Warner looked around with her and couldn’t see anything,

but she leapt up the trunk of the tree, pointing toward the sky. Above Warner’s head was a hidden shotgun the trainer had placed there.

In her brief career, she’s already sniffed out a backpack that once contained pyrotechnics used in theater production and also a bullet fragment lodged in a wall, during an ongoing local investigation. She does stadium sweeps before home football games and checks campus venues before events to make sure there is nothing out of the ordinary.

She’s also a very social dog who works well in crowded environments.

“Nebula is a regular dog that has a cool job,” Warner said. “She lives with me, my wife and my kids. She plays with them and watches over them just like any other house pet.

“In a crowd of people, all she wants to do is meet everyone and give them a lick. She is well-behaved and rarely barks at anything. If you see us out on the job, make sure to come by and say hey to her.”

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