

# Drug dog "Duke" retires from Vermont DMV

BY NANCY REMSEN, BURLINGTON FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2009

Duke wrapped up his career as a drug-sniffing commercial vehicle inspector with some treats and well wishes from the his co-workers at the Department of Motor Vehicles on Monday afternoon in Montpelier.

Since spring 2001, when Duke joined Cpl. Rick Moore on the job, the 11-year-old chocolate Labrador retriever has screened at least 5,000 vehicles for drugs and found illegal substances in 215 instances.

In most of those cases, Duke alerted Moore to small stashes of marijuana or other drugs that drivers carried for personal use, Capt. Jake Elovirta said. Duke's biggest catch was sniffing out 90 pounds of marijuana hidden in a load, Elovirta said.

"Yes, we want to get the large seizures," Elovirta said, but he added that finding personal stashes was equally important. "The last thing you want is a driver with an 80,000 pound tractor-trailer driving under the influence."



Work partners: Duke and Cpl. Rick Moore



Cpl. Rick Moore and Duke on the job.

sniff for drugs aren't conducting a legal search, but a positive sign from a dog is viewed by their police handlers as probable cause to conduct such a search -- with consent or with a court-approved search warrant.

Gilbert said he wasn't aware of any complaints involving Duke or Duchess, but noted, "dogs are far from infallible."

Moore said Duke has an exceptional nose, correctly alerting to the presence of drugs 98 percent of the time during training. He would scratch where he smelled drugs or jump if the smell came from a high place, Moore said. The dog's reward for a correct alert -- a game of fetch with a tennis ball.

Labradors aren't threatening dogs, and Duke often set out on a search with a wagging tail, Moore said.

Duke was the first canine unit affiliated with a department of motor vehicles in New England. Vermont now has a second dog, Duchess, who started work in April 2008 in the southern half of the state.

Duke will be replaced, perhaps as soon as spring, Elovirta said. "We see the benefit," he said. Just having canine units serves as a deterrent, he said.

There have been court challenges in other states involving drug-sniffing dogs, but most have centered on the use of dogs in schools.

Allen Gilbert of the American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont said dogs that

In recent months, Moore said he had to hoist Duke up into cabs. "He's showing his age."

Moore leaves Duke home today for the first time since their partnership began, he said. The dog has traveled in a portable kennel in the back seat of Moore's cruiser, but today he's probably lounging on a couch.

"Working is going to be a different experience without Duke," he said. The past 8 1/2 years "has definitely been the highlight of my career."