



EXTRAORDINARY EMPLOYEES

Officer Larry Wooddell and K-9 partner Boomer epitomize Ut Prosim in career and retirement

by KATIE HUGER

Shaggy and Scooby. Charlie Brown and Snoopy. Turner and Hooch. While these are some of the most recognized person/dog partnerships in pop culture, the New River Valley has a dynamic duo of its own: Virginia Tech Police Officer Larry Wooddell and his yellow Labrador retriever, Boomer.

Wooddell and Boomer have patrolled Virginia Tech's Blacksburg campus together since Boomer came to the university from Germany in 2008. Wooddell, a seasoned officer who has been at the university since 1994, made an instant connection with the then-2-year-old dog.



Boomer is rewarded by Wooddell through play after completing a training exercise. In addition to completing four hours of training exercises every week, Wooddell and Boomer spent three days with a master trainer each month.

After 13 weeks of intensive training through the Virginia State Police, Boomer was certified as the university's (and the region's) first explosives detection K-9. Boomer is trained to identify 25 odors, the compounds of which makeup thousands of different explosives.

On campus, the duo's main responsibilities included daily patrols and checking locations before all major events, such as football games, graduations, guest speakers, and Virginia Tech Board of Visitors meetings.

Wooddell and Boomer are often called across the state to patrol special events, respond to bomb threats, and assist in finding firearms.

No matter where the job takes them, they always operate as a team.

"It's amazing to see how seamlessly they work together," said Wooddell's supervisor, Sgt. James McClain. "Boomer seems to sense and know what needs to be done without Larry even speaking or looking at him."

They also have been actively involved in the university's community policing efforts, including holding demonstrations for employees and students, having lunch with elementary school children, and participating in Kids Tech University.

"The community aspect is what I enjoy the most," said Wooddell. "Through community policing I am able to build relationships, which can provide valuable leads."

McClain credits Wooddell's success as a community police officer to his personable demeanor.

"He has this genuine, down-to-earth way of interacting with people, making it easy for him to build good rapport with those in the department, surrounding departments, and our community," said McClain.

▲ UT PROSIM (THAT I MAY SERVE)

Throughout his 21-year career as a Virginia Tech police officer, Wooddell has embraced the Ut Prosim spirit. He has worked extended hours, undertaken special events with last-minute notice, and subbed for fellow officers when needed.

Prior to joining the K-9 unit, Wooddell served on the university's bike patrol, the first of its kind in the region. He later joined the tactical and diving teams, providing his skills and expertise through every available outlet.

He also filled many other roles for the department, including field training officer, defensive tactics instructor, and general instructor.

▲ THE PATH TO VIRGINIA TECH

After working a variety of odd jobs ranging from truck driving to turkey chasing, Wooddell moved from his hometown of Swoope, Virginia, to Blacksburg to begin a career in law enforcement.

"I thought if I could help someone, whether it was saving their life or helping them have a better life, I needed to do it," he said.

In 1986, Wooddell became a patrol officer for the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, but almost quit after an emotionally taxing first week. He wasn't sure if he could handle the job, he said, but decided to stay in hopes he could still help someone. And for the last 30 years, that is exactly what he has done.

"Larry truly cares about people and making sure they are safe," said Curtis Cook, special projects coordinator for the Office of Emergency Management who retired as a lieutenant from the Virginia Tech Police Department. "He's honest and trustworthy and in my opinion everything a law enforcement officer should be."

After serving as a patrol deputy in Montgomery County for three years, Wooddell became a handler for a narcotics dog.

"Larry found his calling when he became a K-9 handler," said Cook. "He is a natural and is well respected in the K-9 law enforcement community."

Wooddell was the handler for Aces, a black Labrador retriever until 1994, when he joined the Virginia Tech Police Department.

▲ LIFE AFTER VIRGINIA TECH

After a successful career working together, Wooddell and Boomer will retire April 1. Boomer will officially become a member of the Wooddell family.

Wooddell has many plans, but said his first priority is to help Boomer transition from being a working dog to a regular dog.

Boomer will spend his retirement romping around Wooddell's property with the family's five other dogs, going for leisurely car rides, and enjoying plenty of belly rubs – all of which are off limits for working law enforcement dogs.

Wooddell said he is most excited about being able to give Boomer his first dog treat and allowing him to ride shotgun in his personal truck.

Wooddell, on the other hand, will continue to serve others during his retirement.

He and his wife, Michelle, a development associate for the Pamplin College of Business, plan to become foster parents.

"As an officer I've interacted with a lot of children in need," he said. "Some of them even call me dad. I want to be able to continue that in retirement."

During the school year, Wooddell will work three days a week at Home Ride of Virginia, which provides weekend and holiday bus services for students.



The Board of Visitors formally recognized Wooddell and Boomer for their contributions to the university during last week's full board meeting.

He also plans to spend time with his family and train dogs for law enforcement. An avid fisherman and hunter, he is looking forward to spending more time outdoors.

Wooddell's retirement plans are certainly different from his days as an officer; however, he says he doesn't believe he will ever leave Virginia Tech or law enforcement.

"I may be retired, but I will always answer the call if they need me," he said.

Watch Wooddell and Boomer's video on YouTube: https://youtu.be/WJ4R1zD_ynA.

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www.hr.vt.edu/extraordinary_employees/2016/larry-wooddell/

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About this series

The Extraordinary Employee series highlights the achievements of Virginia Tech employees who go above and beyond, making a difference in the lives of others on campus and in the community.