



Italian American Heritage Club Of Hunterdon County

KEEPING OUR *Pride*, CELEBRATING OUR *Culture*, REMEMBERING OUR *Past*

Program Notes for November: Andrea Dente



Andrea Dente is a long time member of the Italian American Heritage Club of Hunterdon County. She lives in Bridgewater and works in the Information Technology field. Her Italian heritage is

in the Naples region, from where her maternal grandparents and paternal great-grandparents were born and raised. Andrea will speak about how Search And Rescue dogs work and her first disaster search experience with Hurricane Sandy.

It was during the 9-11 search and recovery effort, that Andrea became intrigued with dog rescue, and decided that she too wanted to get involved to help save lives. She had many friends that were EMT's and volunteer firefighters involved in that sacred search effort deep in the rubble at the World Trade Center. They all inspired Andrea and she decided to become a Canine Search Specialist. She became a member of the Palisades Search & Rescue Dog Association in Lambertville where she trained and learned how to train her dog to be a rescue dog.

Andrea always loved dogs, and at that time, she had Peaches who was 6 years old. Peaches was Andrea's first Black Lab but she was too old to start as a search dog. She was very smart and fearless and might have made a good search dog if she was started younger. So Andrea set out to find the perfect dog to train.

Andrea's first search and rescue dog, LulaBelle, a black labrador now 10 years old, is retired from Wilderness search and rescue. She was Andrea's first training experience, and although Andrea learned a lot from the experience, LulaBelle was not 100% committed to search and rescue as her responses weren't always consistent. Consistency is a key skill and personality trait for disaster search and rescue.

Andrea's 2nd Dog, Java Bean, "Beans" for short, also a black lab is now 5 years old and was groomed to be a search and rescue dog ever since Andrea laid eyes on her at the breeders home. While visiting with Beans at the breeders, Andrea would play ball with all the dogs there and most of the time, Beans would come out with the ball. Andrea knew that Beans had the perfect personality to be search and rescue dog especially in disaster situations, like 9-11 or later Hurricane Sandy.

Andrea has been a Wilderness Search & Rescue volunteer since January 2002. She trained for 2 years, working side by side with other trainers and their dogs. Dogs and Specialists can be trained in either live scent or human remains, or both. But since Andrea was interested in saving lives, she decided to train her dog in finding live people. Wilderness Search and Rescue teams would often be requested to search for Alzheimer's or Dementia patients that may wandered off, Hunters who were lost after a long day out in the woods or who may have had a heart attack in a duck hut, lost kids, or even suicides. The goal for the dog is to find a live person, and when they do they are rewarded.

Beans had been training since she was 8 weeks old, and she is also trained specifically for disaster search and rescue. With training behind them, both Andrea and Beans, were ready for their first call to duty, just as Hurricane Sandy was coming through. They were on the scene starting that Monday night when the storm began. The first call came in at 2AM. All volunteers and their dogs hopped on the NJ Transit busses, and headed for Little Ferry, the town that was flooded by a breached dam. Then afterwards, they were sent to Ortleigh beach and searched their way to Mantoloking trying to find people alive among the torn down and flooded homes. They combed through mud, slime, trees, and piles of debris. They smelled gas and other nasty things, but the dogs and their volunteer counterparts, kept at it. When asked if she was scared, Andrea said "you know, I didn't even think about it. Yeah, I was nervous about the gas we were smelling, but we just did what we were trained to do."

Andrea was very pleased with Beans first search and rescue deployment. She said that she was not perfect, but she never gave up and was always willing to do what she was commanded to do.

For more information on Canine search and Rescue check out the following groups and their websites:

Palisades Search and Rescue Dog Association, Inc in Lambertville www.palisadeskqsar.org

- PSARDA is a 501C3 federal tax exempt organization. You may send contributions to:

PSARDA 38 Douglas Street, Lambertville, NJ 08530

- NJ Task Force One Urban Search & Rescue www.state.nj.us/njoem/taskforce1