

Sheriff's Deputy Susan Vodrazka and her K-9 counterpart, Hero, regularly patrol the Metro Rail system.



PHOTO BY GAYLE ANDERSON

## Hero to the Rescue

By VERONICA TORREJÓN

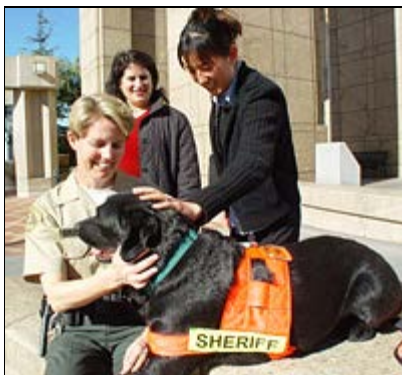
(Dec. 18, 2003) The world could use more heroes. Just ask MTA's newest dynamic duo, Sheriff's Deputy Susan Vodrazka and her K-9 counterpart, appropriately named -- Hero.

"She's the greatest, smartest dog on the planet," says Vodrazka, a 13-year department veteran and member of the Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau.

Trained as a search and rescue team for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Hero and Vodrazka are fully prepared to heed the call should an emergency situation arise.

When not in training, Vodrazka and Hero, a 22-month-old black Labrador Retriever, patrol the rail lines ensuring a safe and fun ride for all passengers.

Hero often draws the affections of passers-by. Here, Marisa Yeager and Kimberly Yu of Government Relations give Hero a lunchtime pat on the head.



### Guest appearances

Sometime soon, they hope to start making guest appearances at safety-related functions and school events.

Like her mythical namesake whose epic love story ended in the tragic death of her lover, Leander, Hero is legendary among children who often rush to greet her when they spot her on trains, or patrolling the stations.

"Oh yeah, she's popular with the kids," Vodrazka says. "And highly social."

She also has the distinction of being the only fully trained search and

rescue dog in the unit. Her predecessor, Buffy, is the personal pet of Sheriff's Lt. Mike Herek. Buffy, who enjoys a largely ceremonial role in the department, occasionally takes shifts patrolling the rail lines with Hero.

"They're friends," Vodrazka says.

### **Solid-gold heart**

Far from the tough looking attack dogs featured in police dramas, Hero has a solid-gold heart, silky-soft black fur and warm brown eyes that could melt steel.

And if a natural or man-made disaster should strike, she just might be the one to save the day. Trained to find human survivors in the rubble of collapsed buildings, Hero can signal emergency personnel by barking for 30 seconds.

Like many search and rescue dogs born post Sept. 11, Hero was given a name befitting a dog of her profession.

"I keep telling her one day she's going to earn it," Vodrazka said. "Then again, in the best case scenario she would never have to."

[Back to MTA Report](#)