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Senior Security Officer Henry Solis and his partner, Nakita, won four trophies in their first K-9 competition.



### The Nose Knows: Bomb Dog Nakita Sniffs Out Trophies in K-9 Competition

- 'I hold the lead and follow her,' handler says of his four-footed partner

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(July 11, 2007) Metro Senior Security Officer Henry Solis can always tell when his explosives detection dog, Nakita, is excited about her work. Her ears prick up, her tail wags and she begins to breathe heavily through her nose.

So, Nakita – a 2 ½-year-old black Labrador – was showing all the telltale signs last weekend at the annual Ventura County Sheriff's K-9 Trials in Oxnard. In three timed events, she alerted Solis to every simulated bomb and explosives package hidden in a succession of rooms, open areas and vehicles.

In what was their first competition, Solis and Nakita placed fourth in area searches and building searches

Photos by Bill Heard

and fifth in vehicle searches. The Metro team also brought home the fifth-place trophy in the overall competition against 50 other area law enforcement K-9 units.

In the first event, the two had five minutes to find hidden explosives in an office building. They successfully completed the search in only 3 ½ minutes. In the next event, a search of some 30 pieces of luggage in a simulated airport setting, Solis and Nakita once again hit their targets well within the allotted time.

"I hold the lead and follow her," says Solis, a 20-year veteran of the Metro security force. "She goes to each bag and searches. When she finds a device, she sits."

**A sensitive nose**

Faced with finding simulated bombs in two of seven vehicles in the final event, Nakita scouted each one from end to end. With a nose sensitive enough to smell the faintest odors, she located one device in the rear wheel well of a Buick and another under the hood of a second car.

Nakita is trained to detect the odors of 12 different types of explosives, including dynamite, various explosive chemicals, a mixture of fertilizer and fuel like that used to destroy the federal building in Oklahoma City, and several types of gunpowder.

"You have to depend on your dog to be right on it," says the 44-year-old security officer. "You just trust your dog and your dog will lead you right to the explosives."

The handler/dog team have responded to bomb threats and to many untended bags and packages since they've worked together. Solis and Nakita, along with Metro's other K-9 teams, also have assisted the LAPD, including helping with the search following a bomb threat at the Kodak Theater.

"We get a good reaction from other agencies," says Solis. "They're glad to see us there."

**General Grant's successor**



At Solis' command, Nakita checks an untended backpack for explosives at the Metro Headquarters Plaza entrance. Below, Nakita checks for explosives in a parked golf cart.



Nakita is Solis' second bomb-sniffing dog. His first was General Grant, a chocolate lab, who retired on a medical disability in September 2006.

Despite suffering from arthritis and dysplasia, a painful and degerative disease in the elbows of both front legs, General Grant ended his career on a high note.

In August 2006, he became suspicious of a man carrying a large backpack. Recognizing the man as a suspect in the burglary of a Metro Green Line ticket vending machine, Solis and another officer apprehended the man.

Today, Nakita and General Grant – who's now a pet in the Solis home – are best friends. And, even though General Grant is retired, he still gets excited when his master is readying the younger dog for a day on patrol. He once jumped into Solis' patrol car, hoping to go along.

"People feel safe" when they see the K-9 teams, Solis says, "and that's what we want to do, project that sense of safety...that our dogs are taking care of business and that they're doing the job."