

A doggone good cop

Capitola's first canine officer forced to retire

By JOHN BESSA
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CAPITOLA — A trend-setting cop at the Capitola Police Department is officially retiring today at the tender age of 7.

Amos, Capitola's first police dog, is leaving his post as the senior canine of the department after four years of service. Weak hips forced the German shepherd off the street in December, but the ball Amos started rolling at the police department in 1990 continues.

"The success of the program with Amos is what convinced them they should have a dog on each side of the week, on each shift," said Marv Gangloff, who trained Amos, his successors, and most of the other police dogs in the county.

The department has used three dogs since Amos started in 1990, said Sgt. Vince Riccabona, Amos' partner.

In his four years working for the city, Amos helped in the arrest of at least 70 criminals, shown off for thousands of children, calmed dozens of tense situations and had to bite only two people, said Riccabona, 46.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Amos cuddles with his partner, Sgt. Vince Riccabona.

He was trained to search buildings, sniff out drugs, follow the trail of bad guys and find lost people.

On several occasions, Amos also had to sit calmly while he was petted, hugged and kissed by school children — sometimes as many as 200 — after a demonstration, Riccabona said.

"He was liked by all of them," he said.

In addition to earning the respect of children and police, Amos also gained the admiration of some of the people he caught, Riccabona said.

On one occasion, a man who

had just kicked down the door to his wife's Capitola home was advancing on Riccabona, he recalled.

He told the 6-foot, 260-pound man to stop and give up or else he would have to deal with Amos.

The man ran off instead.

Ninety-pound Amos caught the man after a short chase, flipping him into the air and then holding him until officers caught up.

"He said the dog hit him like a freight train," Riccabona said. "The guy was really proud. He said, 'That dog can bite me any time. That's a great dog,'" Ricca-

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bona said.

The man sustained scrapes to his arms and legs from the fall, but no serious bite wounds, Riccabona said.

But as Amos aged, his hips started to give him trouble, his partner said. Riccabona started training a successor, Art, another German shepherd.

Amos took it easy near the end of his service.

"I don't think he started hurting until his last four to five months that we had him. He's such a good dog, I certainly wasn't going to put him through anything where I knew he would be uncomfortable," Riccabona said.

But the sergeant's companion at work will remain his companion at home.

"Now he can just be a regular dog in the back yard with us," he said.

A 7 p.m. retirement ceremony at tonight's City Council meeting is planned for Amos.