



Training of Courthouse Facility Dogs

Standard of training needed

A Facility Dog is a professional staff member in the courthouse environment. Although he will be a cherished pet at home when off duty, when he is at work, he is "on duty" all the time. His behavior must be predictable and controllable. For example, while in the courtroom he may be expected to hold a sit or down position for long periods of time. The Facility Dog must never vocalize at all except when told to do so, must obey commands immediately, and has to be rock solid when faced with the most difficult of circumstances. If law enforcement action is needed, for instance, during a shouting match in the courtroom, the Facility Dog must stay motionless, never moving to bark or try to protect his handler. Any misbehavior on the dog's part could result in the ruling of a mistrial, and cost the jurisdiction thousands of dollars and much embarrassment.

How is a Facility Dog trained?

A Facility Dog is acquired as a fully trained adult dog (usually around 2 years of age). After a one or two week handler training period with the organization which trained the dog, a Facility Dog will be able to step into the work environment.

At Canine Companions for Independence and similar organizations, the puppies are the result of a carefully controlled breeding program; at around 8 weeks of age, they are placed into volunteer puppy raising homes for 14 to 18 months. The puppy raiser attends training class each week with the puppy, and goes to great lengths to expose the puppy to a wide variety of people, animals, noises, and experiences during its development.

As a young adult, the dog is returned to CCI and spends months being trained daily by a professional dog trainer. Only dogs that successfully meet health and performance criteria are placed as professional Facility Dogs. At CCI, about 60% of the animals are dropped from the program at some point before going into service.