



Saved: Search-and-rescue dog 'Ace' returns the favour

By Natalie Ann Comeau, ARTICLE, [News](#)

At the tender age of 18-months, the energetic Dutch Shepherd had already worn out his welcome with his original owners. In desperation, they approached their friend Hetty Abma, a dog trainer and member of the Hamilton Police Volunteer Search and Rescue Canine Team. Team leader Dave Walker assessed the young dog and assigned him to Ray Lau, whose German Shepherd Dog had been retired early due to health problems. From then on, Ace participated in over 1,000 hours of search and rescue training a year, year-round, in all kinds of weather. On December 22, 2008, that training finally paid off.

Three days earlier, Donna Molnar, 55, had gone out to run some errands during a snowstorm. When she failed to return home that evening, her family called the police. The next evening, her vehicle was located in the parking lot of a rural market. But Molnar was nowhere to be found.

As a second blizzard blew through the region, 20 police officers and dozens of volunteers, including the Hamilton Police Volunteer Search and Rescue Canine Team, fanned out across the fields adjacent to the market. But drifting snow and heavy winds hampered their efforts as the wind chill drove temperatures below -25°C.

After searching the area Saturday evening and all day Sunday, the searchers returned on Monday. "At that point, we didn't expect to find her alive," Lau explains. But at 12:30 p.m., as he and fellow volunteer Marianne Ivancsics trudged through knee-deep snow, Ace suddenly took off running across the field. Then he started barking and pawing at a mound of snow.

When Lau caught up to his dog, he found Molnar buried under 60 centimetres of snow. "I could just see her eye and part of her face," he recalls. "I couldn't believe she was still alive." As Lau reassured the woman that everything was going to be fine, he and Ivancsics dug her out and covered her with their own jackets until help arrived.

As for Ace, the four-year-old canine hero continued to bark excitedly in anticipation of the toy he always receives for finding a "victim" during twice-weekly training sessions – oblivious to the miracle he had just brought about. Since then, Ace's heroic story has been featured on television and in newspapers around the world.

You can read all about the Hamilton Police Volunteer Search and Rescue Canine Program in the 2009 [Dogs in Canada Annual](#) – on newsstands now.

By Natalie Ann Comeau

Natalie Ann Comeau is a freelance writer with a special interest in working canines. She lives in Oakville, Ont., with her family and two unemployed dogs.



Ray Lau, member of the Hamilton Police Volunteer Search and Rescue Canine Team.