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## Bloodhound Welcomed To Sheriff's Office

By KYLE MARTIN

Hernando Today

Deputy Darla Marie Van Wrinkle bounded into her new job at the sheriff's office Wednesday, happily introducing herself to everyone with a slobbery lick.

As the newest member of the K-9 unit, the 10-month-old bloodhound and her keen sense of smell open new opportunities for Hernando County.

Unlike her counterparts, Darla will not be sniffing out drugs or chomping down on a bad guy's arm. Her task is to track children who wander from home, the missing Alzheimer's patient and the bank robber who bails out of the getaway car.

Before Darla's arrival, the closest bloodhound was in Pasco County.

Sheriff Richard Nugent introduced Darla during a brief ceremony outside headquarters Wednesday and thanked the donor who made Darla possible, Hilary Sessions.

This was the ninth bloodhound of 2008 that Sessions and her organization, Child Protection Education of America (CPEA), have donated. Sessions championed the new dog as a "perfect extension of the department."

Sessions' daughter, Tiffany, went missing in 1989. She believes if a bloodhound had been put on the trail earlier that it might have made a difference.

Many of the departments around the country have the "pointy ear dogs," she said, referring to the German shepherd and Belgian Malinois breeds. But bloodhounds are the best trackers, "bar none," she said.

Darla's handler, Deputy Bill Martinez, agreed.

While the dogs currently on the force have tracking capabilities on par with Darla's, they're limited to the distance they can track. Another difference is that Darla will eventually be able to pick up a scent that is days old.

Darla has the narrow face, floppy ears and bloodshot eyes characteristic to her breed. At 70 pounds, she's about 10 pounds shy of her adult weight. Males can grow up to 150 pounds.

"I didn't feel like heaving a dog that big over a fence," Martinez said as he tried to pry wood chips out of a curious Darla's mouth.

This is Martinez's first experience working with a bloodhound and he's noticed that Darla's drive to succeed matches other police dogs he's handled.

The difference is that other K-9s expect to bite someone after a good track, whereas Darla just wants to

jump on someone and lick them, Martinez said.

Darla has already successfully tracked a missing teenager who stormed out of the house after a fight with his dad.

There are not always happy endings for a successful track, but they can provide closure, said Sessions.

She uses a 2-year-old who went missing in Miami as an example. Within two hours of the child's disappearance, the bloodhound circled a pond near the home. Divers soon found the body.

If it hadn't been for the dog, it's possible that search teams would have combed the woods for days, Sessions said.

"These dogs have a way of saving" resources, Sessions said.