



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Arson K-9 Joins Fire Investigation Team

San Bernardino, CA – There’s another dog in town. San Bernardino County Fire Protection District (SBCFPD) is proud to introduce its newest member of our elite investigative team, Canine (K-9) Ginnie, a 2½-year-old yellow Labrador Retriever.

Ginnie and her handler, Assistant Fire Marshal Brian Headley, recently returned from a 4-week training on the East coast; going through 200 hours of intense training led by the highly accredited Paul Gallagher, Owner and Head Trainer of Maine Specialty Dogs.

In April 2021, SBCFPD launched its first Arson Canine (K-9) program in over 20 years. Fire Investigator Shawn Reiss and his K-9 Dinty, a 5-year-old black Labrador Retriever, have responded to over 50 fire investigations since May 2021 and have assisted several outside agencies with their investigations.

Ginnie & Dinty are currently the only arson canines in San Bernardino County and 2 of 6 teams state-wide.

This Program would not be possible without the partnership of State Farm. The State Farm Arson Dog Training Scholarship funds the \$25,000 estimated cost for acquiring one Arson Dog and sending one handler through the Arson Dog Program training and certification class in Concord, New Hampshire.

“SBCoFire investigators conducted 670 fire investigations in 2021, with a forecast of over 800 investigation calls this year. Programs such as this are important tools in solving arson crimes and getting arsonists off the streets,” stated Fire Chief Dan Munsey. “Only departments selected by State Farm are invited to participate in their Arson Dog Program and we are honored to be one of them. We look forward to our continued partnership with State Farm.”

Ginnie and Dinty are accelerant detection canines, highly trained to sniff out minute traces of accelerants/ignitable liquids (gasoline, lighter fluid, etc.); crucial evidence at fire scenes, identifying the cause of the fire, assisting in cold crime cases, and uncovering potential evidence in arsons and homicides. To remain compliant and accredited, each handler and K-9 must complete a 2-day recertification class each year to confirm that the handler and canine are working together as a team and meeting standards of training.

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“Arson canines are an invaluable resource in arson investigations. Their senses are extraordinary, capable of hitting on a drop of accelerant and can detect flammable liquids over 100 times more accurately than electronic gas detectors,” stated Acting Fire Marshal Monica Ronchetti. “With the increase we are seeing in arson fires, bringing on a second K-9 dog to assist investigators locate evidence that may assist in the identity and conviction of an arsonist is crucial.”

Ginnie and Dinty work and live with their handlers. The Arson Canine Program is a five-year commitment and comes with an annual cost estimated at \$16,000 for each K-9.

Fires and arsonists know no jurisdictional boundary and affects us all. SBCFPD is eager to share our new resource and look forward to assisting our fellow fire and law enforcement agencies regionally.

State Farm Insurance established the Arson Dog Program in 1993 to award scholarships for assistance with the problem of arson in our society. As provided by State Farm, Arson Dogs are an invaluable tool for fire and law enforcement officials to combat the costly and deadly crime of arson. Each year, billions of dollars in property and hundreds of lives are lost as a result of intentionally set fires. Since inception, the State Farm Arson Dog Program has placed more than 435 dogs in 46 states, three Canadian provinces, and the District of Columbia. All accelerant detection canine teams are trained by Maine Specialty Dogs and certified by the Maine State Police.

The Investigation Unit for the SBCFPD Office of the Fire Marshal (OFM), which is comprised of six Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) qualified individuals, is a highly recognized regional investigations unit within the State of California. Other jurisdictions within the State request information on how the unit operates to model their units similarly. Among many of their responsibilities, the OFM Investigation Unit investigates the cause and origin of fires occurring within their jurisdiction, as well as other criminal and civil investigations.

Ginnie & Dinty now have a Facebook and Instagram page. We invite you to follow them and show your support. Their handle is @SBCFireK9.

For more information about the State Farm Arson Dog Program, please visit www.arsondog.org.

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The San Bernardino County Fire Protection District is an all-risk/full-service, premier Fire, Rescue and EMS department committed to providing the highest level of service in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. Our jurisdiction encompasses 19,278 square miles of extremely diverse environments that stretch from the Los Angeles, Riverside and Orange County lines to our south and west, to the Colorado River and Arizona to the east, and the Nevada State line and Kern and Inyo counties on the north. We provide services to more than 60 communities/cities and all unincorporated areas of the county.