

"They learn to go seek out the drugs or the bombs or whatever it is that we ask them to find, and they relate this odor and this odor—'If I smell that odor, and I do what he wants me to, which is to sit and stare, he'll give me the tennis ball,'" Zirkle explained. "So he's not looking for the tennis ball; he's looking for the odors that he knows he'll eventually get that tennis ball for."

In order for Speed to know when it's work time versus play time, he and Schuette spend a lot of time training.

"For our unit, we train as a team ... 10 hours a week," Schuette said. "But that's not all of the training we get. We train daily. Today, this is socialization training—and then also we do obedience training, whether it's on lead [leash] or off lead. And depending on what the dogs are certified in, there's more training. ... If they're tracking—and Speed is one of the tracking dogs—and article searching, those are other disciplines they can train in. I would say, at minimum, it's easy to hit 20 hours a week of training for each dog."

But training is only a part of the equation for creating a good police dog. WCSO wants its dogs to also be social and friendly when they're not working. They achieve this by giving the dogs normal home lives.

Police dogs cost nearly \$30,000 each.

"They go home with [their handlers] at night," Zirkle said. "They integrate into the families at home. They're all strong, social police dogs. Dogs are pack animals, and that family becomes that dog's pack. And then, obviously, it gets ready and goes to work with the officer in the daytime."

They're not kept separate from the families. They're not kept separate from other dogs, for the most part. They're just house dogs that go to work with an officer day in and day out."

While the sheriff's office currently has seven police dogs, there are actually eight positions. But police dogs are expensive to acquire, train and buy protective equipment for. The department gets help with this through a local nonprofit, Washoe County K9 Partners. One of the group's founders is Patti Kelly, who worked for WCSO for three decades before co-founding the nonprofit three years ago.

"Each dog, with the equipment, is anywhere from 25 to \$30,000," Kelly said. "That's why we do what we do. Our whole goal is to make sure that they have what they need and the dogs have what they need so they can go out and protect our community."

Recently, Washoe County K9 Partners helped the sheriff's office obtain three police dogs at a total cost of more than \$75,000. □

The write stuff



On Monday, Nov. 18, the recipient of the 2019 Laxalt Distinguished Writer Award, Jessica Bruder, right, spoke at length about her experience writing her 2017 book *Nomadland*, which chronicles the lives of Americans who live on the road, traveling to find work out of economic necessity. In a conversation with Donica Mensing, Associate Dean of the Reynolds School of Journalism at the University of Nevada, Reno, Bruder detailed her work going undercover at an Amazon warehouse in Fernley and working backbreaking hours at a sugar beet harvest amongst hundreds of retirement-aged Americans forced to live in campers and other converted vehicles to make a living. After the talk and a short Q&A segment, Bruder was presented with the official Laxalt Distinguished Writer Award by Monique Laxalt, daughter of Robert Laxalt, the Nevada author for whom the award is named.

PHOTO/MATT BIEKER

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