



Protecting Children from Predators

ACE winner Rosco finds hidden electronic devices containing evidence of child exploitation.

Photos Courtesy Lt. John Henning

M meet Rosco, a Labrador Retriever who won a [2024 AKC Humane Fund Award for Canine Excellence](#) for his work as an electronic storage detection K-9.

Rosco loves kids, so it's fitting that he often visits classrooms to help teach students about internet safety. His handler, Lt. John Haning of the Rogers County Sheriff's Office in Oklahoma, asks, "Does anyone have a cell phone?"

Haning makes a point of covering Rosco's eyes while a student hides a phone. He'll explain that Rosco is an electronic storage detection (ESD) K-9 who is trained to alert when he smells the chemical present in all electronic devices to keep them from overheating.

Humans can't smell the chemical, but Rosco can. He finds the phone every time—and the classroom erupts with excited cheers.

"When we go to the schools and we do these internet safety presentations, Rosco just loves interacting with kids," Haning says. "He loves the attention. He loves kids."

He also loves his job as an ESD K-9. Haning partnered with Rosco in 2023 to sniff out electronic evidence of crimes against children perpetrated by child traffickers and other abusers—anything involving child exploitation online or human trafficking.

As members of two federal task forces (the Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Task Force and the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force), they join law enforcement in executing search warrants to find hidden cell phones, as well as flash drives, memory cards, cameras, and room keys—any kind of electronic device that stores data.

Rosco can sniff out devices buried in the ground, hidden in walls, submerged in water, or even burned. He's swept commercial facilities filled with boxes and school locker rooms for hidden cameras.

Typically, human detectives search the



Lt. John Haning hopes that Rosco's award brings attention to a big problem: child sexual abuse material. "People are creating it so they can sell it to people who buy it or view it. So the more attention we bring to that problem, maybe our lawmakers will make the laws stay up to technology," he says.

property and then Rosco comes in to check to see if there's any evidence they missed. There usually is.

"About 85 to 90 percent of the time, we'll find something overlooked on the sweep," Haning says.

That can mean the difference between a child predator walking away or being charged with a crime—and can lead to longer prison sentences.

But to Rosco, he's just playing a game.

GO ROSCO, GO

The food-motivated Lab is fed (by hand) only for a successful find, so Haning is sure to schedule training sessions twice a day when they aren't called out for a search warrant (they get a call for a warrant about four times a month).

The way Rosco alerts Haning can depend on where the electronic device is hidden.

"If you take dry ice and you pour

hot water on it, you know how the gases boil over and they sink straight down? That's what scent looks like," he explains. "So if I took a microSD card and stuck it above a ceiling fan and you can picture dry ice coming off that fan and going straight down, if there's air movement from the AC unit or people walking around, you can imagine that the gases would move around."

In this instance, Rosco would get underneath the odor, sit, and look at Haning, who'd respond by urging, "Show me." Then Rosco would jump in the direction where he smells the odor.

"When he smells the odor he's looking for, his nose will blow out and he'll exhale," he says. "If it's closer, he'll actually try to put his nose on it. Then he gets rewarded with his food, and we keep on going."

As a friendly Lab, Rosco can also offer comfort to victims and family members

HEROES & HELPERS

during searches. During an international operation in Ecuador, a young girl with special needs was hysterically crying during the search in a back room with her grandmother. So Haning introduced her to Rosco to show her that he can shake hands and do other tricks.

“She calmed down, stopped crying, and really focused on Rosco,” he recalls. “She was feeding him and playing with him and just ignored what was going on around her.”

Back in Oklahoma, Rosco visits child advocacy centers to offer comfort to children talking about horrible things they’ve experienced by resting his chin in their lap. One young girl felt scared to talk about her rape in court, so Rosco accompanied her to the courthouse and sat beside her as she testified against her attackers.

At the sheriff’s department, Rosco offers stress relief to the detectives who



must review evidence that involves deeply disturbing images of children. They might take him outside for a walk to take a break, or just spend a little time petting the cuddly Lab.

“He’s a 70-pound Lab who thinks he’s

a three-pound Chihuahua,” Haning says with a chuckle. “He’s sitting on laps.”

TRAINING TWEAKS

Rosco’s trainer, Todd Jordan, founder of Jordan Detection K-9 in Indianapolis, always trains electronics detection dogs for therapy dog work as well as search. Jordan, a former firefighter, has trained over 200 electronics detection dogs since training and handling Bear, the Labrador who found the thumb drive during the 2015 FBI raid that put former Subway spokesperson Jared Fogle behind bars.

Jordan primarily trains Labs for the work because of their powerful noses, and since they love the work so much—particularly the praise and food it entails.

It was initially challenging to train dogs to detect the chemical compound found in electronics (triphenylphosphine oxide), though now he has it down to a science.

“The smell and the odor is just so minute that it’s not like drugs or accelerants,” he says. “If you put a drop of gas in the middle of the floor, within five minutes, everybody smells the gas. But this odor doesn’t have an odor that we can detect, so it’s a bit more difficult to get them on it.”

The demand—and need—for ESD K-9s continues to grow. In 2023, the





Internet Safety for Minors

When Lt. John Haning brings Rosco to classrooms to teach students about internet safety, one of his main points is to never take a picture of yourself—or of anything—that you don't want the whole school to see.

"If you already have such photos, delete them. Once they hit the internet, they never go away," he cautions. "Do you want to see a picture of your grandfather or your grandmother naked? No, you don't. Neither do your kids when you get older."

"CyberTipline" of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children received 36.2 million reports of suspected online child sexual exploitation—and reports of online enticement increased more than 300 percent between 2021 and 2023, according to the nonprofit.

Jordan is alarmed by the increase, so he's grateful he gets calls and texts every day from ESD K-9 handlers about successful finds. The day before an interview for this article, one handler texted him that a dog he trained found a cell phone in a three-ring binder for the FBI; another dog found a phone hidden in a wall.

"Everybody has a cell phone," he notes. "It's overwhelming how many cases are being solved because of the dogs."

RECOGNIZING ROSCO

Jordan takes care to match the personality of each dog with their handler. He feels Rosco and Haning matched up "really well."

"Their personalities are so similar—just a jovial type of personality," he says. "They're busy. They're always working and doing what they need to be doing, and have had a lot of good finds because of it."

He is pleased that the American Kennel Club named Rosco the winner of the Uniformed Services K-9 category in the 2024 AKC Humane Fund Awards for Canine Excellence, which was televised on ESPN2 last December to honor canine heroes.

Brandi Hunter Munden, AKC Vice President of Public Relations and Com-

munications, says the work of detection dogs like Rosco is incredibly important for the protection of children and the community.

"While electronic device detection is still a growing skill for dogs, Rosco has proven to excel at it, not just for his community but any community that has a need," she says. "In this time where predators are finding more and more tools to use, this form of detection is crucial to finding and helping current victims and preventing new ones."

Rogers County Sheriff Scott Walton hopes the award helps highlight the country's urgent need for "more Roscos." He's grateful to the nonprofit Our Rescue for donating Rosco to his team, which he calls "a blessing."

"Child predators are such a threat to kids right now, and then here comes Mother Nature to the rescue: a lovable ol' dog that does something that nobody else can do," he says. "It's really insane what that dog's capabilities are." **FD**

Journalist Jen Reeder is the 2025 Hall of Fame inductee of the Dog Writers Association of America.

Follow Rosco the ESD Dog on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).

Click to learn more about [Our Rescue](#).



When he's not working, Rosco enjoys life as a family dog with Lt. John Haning, his wife, and their 13-year-old daughter. "She sleeps on Rosco like a pillow," he says.