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PRESS RELEASE

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HILAND MTN. CORRECTIONAL CENTER, MAT SU ANIMAL CARE CENTER BEGIN ALASKA'S FIRST 'CELL DOG' OBEDIENCE TRAINING PROGRAM

JUNEAU – Alaska's first 'cell dog' program has begun at Hiland Mountain Correctional Center in Eagle River with ten female inmate volunteers and five dogs from the Mat-Su Animal Care Center. The program is called SPOT for Shelter Pet Obedience Training.

"Cell dog programs have a proven successful in correctional institutions nationally and internationally," said Corrections Commissioner Marc Antrim. "The department is always looking for innovative programs which involve prisoners in productive activities."

Cell dog programs are particularly effective because of their unique benefit to inmates and the community, explained HMCC Superintendent Dean Marshall. "It's good for the inmates because it teaches values such as patience and dedication, and it's a good management tool for the institution because it is an incentive for good behavior and allows inmates to give something back to the community.

"In order to take part in the program, inmates must volunteer, have no disciplinary write-ups, have or be actively working for a GED, and must have six or more months left in their sentence," said Superintendent Dean Marshall.

Under the SPOT program, inmates are first taught obedience training skills, and then are paired with an abandoned or abused dog from the animal shelter. Each dog is under the care of a two-person team, which allows inmates to continue prison jobs or break for meals. The dogs remain with their inmate trainers for 6-10 weeks, and then are returned to the shelter where they are put up for adoption.

The animal care center will prescreen dogs for suitability and good health, and will make sure the dogs are current on shots. In addition, the center will provide kennels, food, leashes and feeding bowls. "The only cost to the institution is for some hot dogs which are cut in half and given to the dogs as rewards after each 15-minute training session," Marshall said.

The program has begun with five dogs: two females and three males. There is "Gurly," a female husky, "Tisha," a collie-shepherd mix, "Maximus," a male husky, "Bilbo," a whippet mix, and "Razor," an American bulldog.

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