

'My hero'

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Hero dog saved woman from death in icy river

By MIKE BEGGS
Special

"I was going under. They wouldn't have found me until spring."

Those were Phyllis McLeod's thoughts when, while walking her dog Sam through Credit Valley Golf Club one afternoon last March, she went through a large slab of ice into a hidden current below.

However, that was when her 8-year-old German Shepherd intervened, managing to pull her from the freezing, waist-deep water.

For her actions, Sam was one of four dogs inducted into Ralston-Purina's Animal Hall Of Fame on Monday in an emotional awards ceremony at Harbourfront Centre.

On their daily walk through the golf course, the

Mississauga mother of three had been traversing the chunks of ice scattered by the nearby Credit River, with the dog running free.

After crashing through, McLeod tried to claw herself out, and then screamed for Sam. She ordered the dog to crouch, grabbed onto its collar, and then shouted, "Pull." She was able to swing one leg out of the water, and then the other.

"I feel very privileged," said McLeod, 58. "I think its very rare a pet and its owner have a bond like this."

"What inherent instinct made this magnificent beast stay, and sit, and pull?"

She noted that Sam is not trained on command, and ordinarily "won't come when she's called."

One of Canada's leading pet food manufacturers, Ralston-Purina established its Animal Hall Of Fame in 1968 to recognize acts of courage, loyalty and intelligence by pets. The Mississauga-based company has honored 80 dogs, cats and horses since then.

"It's absolutely amazing to think of these animals risking their own lives," said Anne Godfrey, director of marketing for Ralston-Purina Canada Inc. "That she'd have the strength to actually pull her owner out (of the water)."

Sam was presented with an official hero's medal, an original portrait and a one-year supply of Purina product.

Three of the four 1994 inductees were German Shepherds.

Four-year-old Ken Knickle was saved from drowning in the icy harbor of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, when his black Labrador, Belle swam after him; while 78-year-old Ken Emerson of Vienna, Ont. was rescued from beneath an overturned tractor, when his dog Nellie alerted others. The 1994 Police Dog Of The Year was Ewo, who works with the Niagara Regional Police Force.



Phyllis McLeod puts the squeeze on 'Sam,' her German Shepherd, after the 8-year-old dog was inducted into Ralston-Purina's Animal Hall Of Fame Monday for pulling her out of the Credit River after she had broken through the ice last Spring. Story on page ?

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