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A new breed of security

Teams, leagues are looking to specially trained dogs to make their venues far safer

BY DAVID BROUGHTON

STAFF WRITER

He was made for this job. That's something you might say about someone who's performing at an elite level. Or, maybe you'd say it when someone's work seems to come naturally to him.

In this case, it's when science and technology meet modern-day sports facility safety needs.

Meet Young. He's a Vapor Wake dog. That makes him part of the latest line of defense in sports venue security.

See **Dogs** Page 39

Learfield's run fuels talk of sale

Could college power bring price of \$1B?

BY MICHAEL SMITH

STAFF WRITER

Learfield last month closed on its 10th acquisition in two-plus years, adding fuel to the rampant speculation that the company is about to be sold again after a flurry of deals and rapid earnings growth.

The question making the rounds now among industry insiders: Can Learfield fetch a price of \$1 billion or more?

Providence Equity Partners, a Rhode Island private equity firm, owns the majority of shares in Learfield, so there's little doubt the company will be flipped at some point. It's just a matter of when.

Learfield officials would not discuss whether it is technically for sale.

"If we were active or inactive, I wouldn't talk about it," Learfield President and CEO Greg Brown said.

See **Learfield** Page 8

A big splash: How an Olympic trials became a moneymaker

BY BEN FISCHER

STAFF WRITER

The competition pool at the Olympic swim trials was closed for cleaning between sessions, but 10-year-old Meghan Knier was soaked.

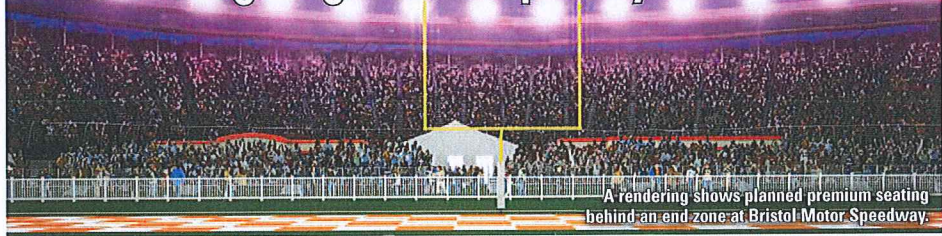
She was next door at the Century-Link Center in downtown Omaha, Neb., learning to surf on a wave machine sponsored by Marriott Rewards in the USA Swimming Aqua Zone. Looking nervously at her mother, Knier let go of her instructor. She fell instantly, disap-

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► A look inside the USA House in Rio, **PAGE 43**

► Worries over Rio fail to dissipate, **PAGE 44**

Bristol brings big-time hospitality to its 'Battle'



A rendering shows planned premium seating behind an end zone at Bristol Motor Speedway.

BY MICHAEL SMITH

STAFF WRITER

Tennessee and Virginia Tech will storm the field in two months in one of the most heavily anticipated events this year, and in the process, they'll run past some of the most unusual on-field premium areas ever devised for the college football game at Bristol Motor Speedway.

Stadium seating on the racetrack, clubs and lounges on pit road, helicopter rides to the stadium—Bristol will have a bit of everything when NASCAR meets the gridiron.

At least four premium hospitality spaces will put fans either next to the field or on the racetrack for the novel Sept. 10 game that will be played inside the transformed

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MARK COYLE
Director of Athletics



Dogs

■ Vapor Wake dogs a new layer of security

FROM PAGE 1

Bred at Auburn University's Canine Performance Sciences facility, Young can, like traditional explosive-detection dogs, sniff out substances that might be stashed in a stationary object, such as a backpack, a trash can or an unattended package. But Young and the more than 100 other dogs that have gone through Auburn's patented 18-month growth and development program can do more than what those more familiar bomb-sniffing dogs can do.

As Vapor Wake dogs, Young and his peers are being bred and trained to identify potentially explosive materials in a surrounding environment. They're able to do so by detecting particles in the air left behind by moving targets. So instead of having to find danger from smelling stationary objects one at a time, these dogs can walk through or around a stadium and detect whether something dangerous might have preceded them through the area.

"A lot of people can breed dogs, but I'd rather have Auburn University sitting next to me in a court of law than Billy Bob the Breeder from the Ozarks."

JOE WALSH

DIRECTOR OF SECURITY AND SPECIAL SERVICES,
ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

Teams and leagues are taking note. Several MLB clubs have vapor dogs in use at their ballparks this year — including Young's team, the St. Louis Cardinals. Other teams have orders in so as to have them on-site next year. The NFL and NBA employed them for one-time use at showcase events this year.

The dogs aren't cheap. One dog and the price of the mandatory training program for the animal and his or her handler can cost upward of \$50,000, and the purchase is typically made in conjunction with a local police authority given the canine-care requirements needed. But when that price is balanced against the risk of not being out front on matters of venue security, it's an option more people in sports today are choosing to take.

"[These dogs] are highly energetic and 100 percent obedient to the odor," said Paul Hammond, managing director of AMK9 Academy, Auburn's commercial partner



Vapor Wake dogs are made familiar with every inch of the venues where they'll work.

in the program. "They interrogate the environment."

■ ■ ■

The Vapor Wake program draws its origin from the 1988 in-air bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. It was then that the Federal Aviation Administration publicly expressed a desire to use more detection dogs at U.S. airports. At the same time, Auburn — with a nationally renowned veterinary program — was approaching the situation from a perspective more its own: how to build a better detection dog.

In 1989, it created the Institute for Biological Detection Systems, made up of Auburn scientists, veterinarians and engineers, to provide more dedicated research. It also proceeded to start a breeding program as a means of providing government entities with the increasingly in-demand explosive-detection dogs.

The breeding and research continued through the 1990s, with development of a vapor-specific training program starting to take shape during that time. In 2001, Auburn's efforts and those of the FAA both got a jolt when the Australian Customs Service donated a breeding stock to three entities: U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the Transportation Security Administration, and Auburn. That increased the availability of dogs for all detection efforts. Today, however, Auburn is the only breeding program left of the three, and with its vapor program becoming a patented effort, the development of vapor-detection dogs has become Auburn's program to run nationally.

The first buyer in the vapor-detection pro-

gram was the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, the city's public transportation system, which acquired Tabbie (the program's first graduate) in 2004. Amtrak is the program's biggest current customer, with more than 30 dogs purchased, and law enforcement agencies across the country have taken to adding vapor dogs to their staffs in tandem with their more traditional explosive-detection dogs.

At Auburn, the staff at the 208,000-square-foot Wilford and Kate Bailey Small Animal Teaching Hospital carefully screens dogs for every possible physical defect before tabling them as breeding subjects for the Vapor Wake program. The dogs being produced still draw from the Labrador stock provided by the Australian Customs Service, but they are typically cross-bred with U.S. hunting Labs and other high-performing detection breeds.

Once born, each new dog is put through annual checkups for dexterity and to make sure there are no bone, joint and muscular weaknesses or deformities, and each must complete an intense training program (see box, below).

While that training and development ef-

fort is rigorous, representatives of the teams that have used the dogs say their interest in the program starts with the attention given to the breeding process.

"A lot of people can breed dogs," said Joe Walsh, director of security and special services for the St. Louis Cardinals, "but I'd rather have Auburn University sitting next to me in a court of law than Billy Bob the Breeder from the Ozarks."

Walsh knows the program well. In addition to having Young, the Cardinals call on the services of Shug, a black Labrador retriever, and Upshaw, a golden, both of whom have been present at every ticketed event at Busch Stadium since the Cardinals bought them in July 2014.

The Cardinals were the first sports entity in the world to buy this canine technology. It happened under the directive of Walsh, who's been with the team since 1993. He worked for 16 years before that as a St. Louis police officer and a district detective.

"After 9/11, we knew we needed more security," Walsh said. "I thought it would be beneficial to have dogs ... but I could

See **Dogs** Page 40

Canine timeline

The Vapor Wake detection-training program for Auburn University and AMK9 features a highly structured, 18-month process for the participating dogs.

■ 3-4 weeks old: A microchip is implanted, and the puppy is named — either by a Canine Performance Sciences staff member at Auburn or a supporter of the program. (A \$3,000 donation to CPS brings the right to name one dog; a \$5,000 or \$10,000 donation gives naming rights to an entire litter.) CPS-named dogs in a litter are named in alphabetical order, similar to the way hurricanes are named.

■ 7 weeks to 6 months: Dogs are brought in pairs to K-12 schools, playgrounds, retirement homes and parks. They go to new environments and events regularly and build from simple to complex tasks aiming to prepare them for real-world work.

■ 6 months: Each dog moves into one of the five prisons that participate in the program to sharpen their senses and

give them one-on-one human contact 24 hours a day.

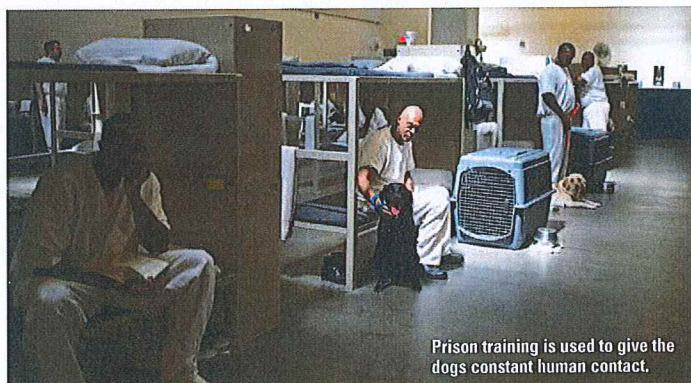
■ 1 year: The dogs move to an AMK9 training facility in Anniston, Ala., for an intensive, 10-week vapor-specific syllabus where the dogs learn how to search buildings, luggage, freight, vehicles, stadiums and arenas.

■ 15 months: Exceptionally high-performing dogs head back to Auburn to be put into the program's breeding stock. Each remaining dog is paired with a handler for an additional seven-week training course that the dog and individual will complete together.

■ 17 months: Each dog is delivered to his or her permanent home venue, where the dog-and-handler team completes a one-week on-site training program specific to that venue.

■ Each year after that: The dogs must pass a physical exam and a detection-performance test to make sure they remain on point.

— David Broughton



Prison training is used to give the dogs constant human contact.

never figure out how it could make sense financially for a team."

Walsh (who coincidentally grew up in St. Louis' Dogtown neighborhood) said that before the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Cardinals would hire law enforcement to sweep the ballpark for explosives before a big game or if a dignitary were going to be present. That policy generally remained in place in the years that followed 9/11 despite a desire to do more, because having a dog's services available full time, for the team's 81-game home slate, wasn't a viable option. Every dog needs a designated handler, and the idea of assigning a canine-human duo to 81 Cardinals games wasn't feasible.

"The police departments could never guarantee 81 games a year," Walsh said. "Dogs get sick, handlers get sick, other big events come up."

But in 2013, Walsh heard that Auburn had received a patent for its vapor-based breeding and training program. He was intrigued enough to travel to Alabama to see the situation for himself.

He liked what he saw.

"It is exactly what we need at stadiums," he said. "A stadium is not like an airport, where everyone is funneled through a single checkpoint. That's OK for standard detection dogs."

Walsh said that with vapor-detection dogs, a team can extend its security perimeter beyond a facility's entrances. That was important to him because Busch Stadium is the anchor of the 10-acre Ballpark Village mixed-use development.

But at \$35,000 a puppy (the price at the time), Walsh still could not make the numbers work for the Cardinals to purchase and, more important, continually care for a dog of their own. So the team worked out an agreement to purchase its first two dogs, Shug and Upshaw, and donate one each to the city and county police departments. Young and his permanent handler, also from the city's police department, completed their seven-week training course together in May. After that, they spent a week of getting to know Busch Stadium—all its nooks and smells, and even its sounds.

While it's the smelling skills that largely define Vapor Wake dogs, their training program builds attentiveness to certain sounds,



The 2015 college football title game is among the events that have had Vapor Wake protection.

the ballpark, but the dogs are available for use by the departments for non-Cardinals business beyond those game-day services.

The dogs typically arrive three hours before the first pitch and remain on-site for a total of roughly eight hours a night, includ-

Vapor-detection dogs can smell a wake of potentially explosive material up to 10 minutes after it has passed a particular point.

ing an hour of built-in downtime. Their presence is why Walsh was perhaps less anxious than many other venue operators on the night of the Paris terrorist attacks last November. On that same night, 44,000 people were entering Walsh's ballpark to see the U.S. men's soccer team play a 2018 World Cup qualifying match against St. Vincent and the Grenadines. There were eight FBI agents present, typical for a U.S.-based international event of that nature. But that wasn't all.

"If we had not had Vapor Wake dogs," Walsh said, "I would have been a lot more worried."

Paul Waggoner is co-director of the Canine Performance Sciences facility at Auburn. He said that after the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013, the interest in Auburn's dog program notably increased. That might sound like a prime business opportunity, but the state of Alabama prohibits publicly funded schools such as Auburn from making a profit on the sale of any products or services.

That's where AMK9, Hammond's company, comes in. Auburn signed an agreement in 2013 with AMK9 that gives that company exclusive rights to train and sell the Auburn-bred dogs.

Auburn holds the two patents and the trademarks tied to the Vapor Wake name and training process. AMK9 is responsible for the financial pieces of the relationship. It pays for the dogs' trainers and handles the sale of the dogs to their permanent homes. Auburn does draw a percentage of the revenue from each sale, but that money is reinvested as part of CPS remaining in line with state law and being revenue-neutral.

"This is all about operations meeting science," Waggoner said. "Besides, we're

scientists, not marketers, so there was no danger of us making any money from this."

Waggoner oversees the science side. He said that in the past 50 years, breeding has improved dogs' abilities to sense a few rogue particles per million to parts per trillion and that vapor-detection dogs can smell a wake of potentially explosive material up to 10 minutes after it has passed a particular point. That's why vapor-trained dogs are so effective in sports settings. However, he said, the sensitivity that has developed in dogs' noses over the past half-century is unlikely to continue to sharpen.

"A dog's nose has reached the point where it is about as sensitive as any instrument needs to be," he said. "Now the question is, How do we engineer the rest of the tool to make it the best detection instrument possible?"

For example, dogs have no natural proclivity to smell gunpowder, Waggoner said, yet they can be trained to find it and react to it.

Enter Hammond and the operations side. Before joining AMK9, Hammond spent 15 years in Northern Ireland with the British army's dog unit countering Irish Republican Army terrorist activity, and he spent a total of seven years in Iraq (for the U.S. Department of Defense) and Afghanistan (with a private defense contractor for the U.S. Department of State). He found his way from there to Anniston, Ala., home of Auburn's Canine Detection Training Center, where AMK9 runs the patented training program.

Situated at an old military base two hours north of Auburn, the 320-acre property is the largest canine training facility in the United States, housing at any time as many as 150 detection dogs—not only vapor dogs, but also explosive-detection dogs, drug-detection dogs and other similarly trained canines. This is where the dogs and their handlers receive the most rigorous portion of their vapor training. There are six to eight canines in a Vapor Wake class, with a 6:1 trainer-to-dog ratio.

Approximately 70 percent of the dogs bred at Auburn go on to successfully complete the Vapor Wake training. The remaining percentage are used for detecting explosives devices (i.e., traditional bomb-sniffing dogs). Some dogs don't meet either standard, but Hammond said that's as few as 1 percent to 2 percent, and those dogs can still become a different kind of detection or service dog.

The training process, which took seven years to develop, consists of about 15 weeks of social and physical conditioning. By way

of comparison, Hammond said, explosive-device detection dogs usually require about eight weeks to train.

A critical difference in the way vapor dogs are trained comes from what is essentially a role reversal: In a traditional explosives search, a handler leads the dog to each container or a piece of luggage, one item at a time, and the dog attempts to pick up a scent of any targeted item. The handler, holding a standard leash and collar, is the one who directs the search while the dog is used merely as a sniffing mechanism. With the harness-clad vapor dogs, the process is unquestionably led by the nonstop dog, with the handler more along for the ride.

Another big difference is the purchase price. A team buying a single vapor dog now pays about \$49,000 for the dog and its

Vapor Wake dogs in sports

■ **NFL and NBA:** Brought in dogs for single-event use at Super Bowl 50 and the 2016 NBA All-Star Game.

■ **St. Louis Cardinals:** Purchased two dogs in 2014; a third joined the team last month.

■ **Ilitch Holdings:** Acquired three dogs in May for use in its ongoing District Detroit project that, upon completion, will include Comerica Park and Little Caesars Arena (scheduled to open in 2017) as well as commercial and residential real estate development.

■ **Dallas Cowboys, Texas Rangers, Dallas Wings:** Draw from a group of six dogs that the Arlington (Texas) Fire Department has purchased and cares for to provide coverage at their games.

■ **Auburn University:** Uses dogs for all events at its football stadium and basketball arena.

■ **Atlanta Braves:** Hires four dog-handler teams for each game and other events at Turner Field.

■ **Chicago Cubs:** Recently purchased a dog; training program began last month.

■ **Michigan State University:** Recently purchased a dog that joins one dog MSU already has through Ilitch Holdings; training program begins next month.

—Compiled by David Broughton



Vapor Wake dogs are on-site for Atlanta Braves games at Turner Field.

as well. Specifically, they are taught to differentiate what sounds are appropriate in various settings—whether it's sounds for a park, a school or a stadium. Being able to identify an inappropriate sound can be as beneficial as detecting a wake of dangerous material.

The dogs' handlers, members of the police squads, are paid a per-event wage by the Cardinals. The respective law enforcement departments take care of the dogs' remaining expenses. In exchange, the team is guaranteed coverage for every event at

training, a price that's 40 percent higher than what the Cardinals paid for Shug and Upshaw two years ago. That increase is, in part, a nod to the growing demand for the program. But venue operators overseeing footprints that have multiple entrances and host events 12 months a year insist that the investment in up-to-date fan safety is worth the expense.

Ilitch Charities, a 501(c)(3) group operating under the Ilitch Holdings umbrella, recently became the biggest spender in sports to date. The group purchased three vapor dogs in May and will donate one each to the police departments at Michigan State, Wayne State and the city of Detroit.

Rick Fenton, vice president of corporate security for Ilitch Holdings, said the plan is to have coverage at the Detroit Tigers' Comerica Park as of Opening Day 2017, and then when the Red Wings begin play that fall in their new Little Caesars Arena. Adding to the purchase price is the fact that, in this case, AMK9 is staffing and managing the operation, as opposed to the police departments providing handlers for the program.

The end result is that there will be at least one dog-handler team patrolling the 50-acre District Detroit development, an expanse that includes the arenas, every day of the year for years to come.

Fenton knows about detection dogs. He retired in 2000 as the executive commander of the Wayne County Sheriff Department after more than 27 years of service. During that time, he spent seven years as police chief and commander at Detroit Metropolitan Airport, where he oversaw eight German shepherd canine teams.



Iris is among the dogs due to contribute more puppies to the program this month.

"The presence of any dog is going to be a deterrent," he said. "But we had three biting incidents in my years at the airport. German shepherds can detect explosives, but it seems they don't like 10-year-olds stepping on their tails. That's a big reason why the Vapor Wake process was so attractive to me. Labs like people."

He said the decision to purchase what he calls "the Ferrari of canines" and hire the company that trained them gives the Ilitch group a sense of security.

"When you simply go out and contract someone to be in charge of your fan's safety, you don't know what steps that group is taking outside your venue to stay up to date on the latest threats or technologies," Fenton said. "We adopt security practices not just to check it off our list or because



the league mandated it."

■■■

The addition of detection dogs at any venue protects more than just the fans.

Comerica Park in September was awarded a federal Safety Act "designation and certification" standard, the highest level of protection available in a program run by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. It gives the Tigers protection from paying claims that might be filed by victims in the event of a terrorist attack at the ballpark.

John Petrone, president and partner of Petrone Risk, a risk-management entity that has been hired by several NFL teams and college athletic departments to help navigate Homeland Security's Safety Act application process, said adding vapor dogs is an example of how groups like Ilitch Holdings stay ahead of the game.

"Safety Act approval is not a one-time thing," he said. "You don't just get the award and be done. The application requires you to guarantee that you will continue to train staff on new protocols and upgrade your security capabilities as new technologies come along."

AMK9, through its parent company, ITC Capital Partners, received a Safety Act "developmental testing and evaluation" designation from Homeland Security last summer. Michael Murray, ITC's vice president of legal affairs, said that protection level will convert into the department's longer-term, higher-level "designation" standing on Aug. 31. That's a reflection of the company having completed testing and trial deployment of elements related to protection—in this case, the vapor dogs.

Fenton has to wait until next year to see his investment in action in Detroit, but several other MLB clubs are in various stages of acquiring a dog. Among them are the Chicago Cubs, who bought a Vapor Wake dog that began the seven-week training class with its handler in Anniston in June.

"Once that process is complete, we plan to work with a local law enforcement partner to handle on-site detection at Wrigley Field," said Julian Green, the team's vice president of communications and community affairs.

On two occasions last summer, the Cubs were victims of what turned out to be non-credible bomb threats. At the time, the city of Chicago owned three vapor dogs (Bolt, Potsie and Squiggy). The city has purchased five more dogs that are scheduled to be added to its lineup by the end of the summer. The Cubs' own purchase will further

add to those assets.

Not far to the east of Auburn, Larry Bowman, vice president of stadium operations and security for the Atlanta Braves, is in his third season as an AMK9 client.

"As with any security decision, we spend a lot of time looking at which technology or procedure fits best with your situation," Bowman said.

The Arlington (Texas) Fire Department has six vapor dogs and intends to purchase more as its three traditional explosive-detection dogs retire. The department uses these dogs to provide coverage at all Dallas Cowboys, Texas Rangers and WNBA Dallas Wings games, said Darin Niederhaus, the city's fire marshal and bomb squad commander, adding that his six vapor canine teams worked more than 2,700 hours in total in 2015. That work load included the 2015 College Football Playoff national championship game at AT&T Stadium.

"German shepherds can detect explosives, but it seems they don't like 10-year-olds stepping on their tails. That's a big reason why the Vapor Wake process was so attractive to me. Labs like people."

RICK FENTON
ILITCH HOLDINGS
VP, CORPORATE SECURITY

According to city records, Arlington spent \$150,000 on the dogs and their services last year. The city is paid by the teams to have the dogs on-site for their games.

At the league level, the NFL used vapor dogs at Super Bowl 50 in Santa Clara, Calif., earlier this year. Two vapor dog-handler teams spent four days at the NBA All-Star festivities in Toronto in February, screening player hotels, ancillary events and Air Canada Centre before the game itself.

■■■

Back at Auburn, the development of future detection dogs continues around the clock. As of July 1, 21 puppies around 11 months old were at the end of their social training in the master training program, and 31 more under six months of age were in the early stages of training.

CPS staff members name each of the dogs

DOG DIGITS

105:

No. of Canine Performance Sciences "alumni" (dogs) working in the United States

11:

No. of adult dogs currently in the breeding program at Auburn

31:

No. of puppies in the program under 6 months of age

21:

No. of puppies around 11 months old poised to begin AMK9's dedicated vapor-training program

\$49,000:

Current purchase price of a Vapor Wake dog (including training-program cost)

20120111285-A1 and 8959982 B2:

U.S. patent numbers held by Auburn/AMK9 for the Vapor Wake training process and its implementation

77822568, 86753150 and 86753177:

Certified trademark numbers held by Auburn/AMK9 in conjunction with the Vapor Wake name

— Compiled by David Broughton

born into the program, with an alphabetical-order naming system used. But financial supporters of the program can play a role in the naming process, too. For a \$3,000 donation to CPS's Help Raise a Hero program, a person can have the right to name a puppy; \$5,000 gives a person naming rights to an entire litter.

And more dogs are on the way. Iris, a 2 1/2-year-old Labrador-Deutsch Drahthaar cross breed, was due to "whelp the D5 litter" this past weekend, according to Pam Haney, CPS's breeding program manager — D5 meaning this is the fifth run-through the alphabet for litters in the program, and all the dogs in this litter will have "D" names.

Darby, a yellow Lab, is due Friday. Hers will be the E5 litter. Kiki, a black Lab, is due July 29. Hers will be the F5 litter.

Additionally, two more Labs (one black, one yellow) are awaiting pregnancy confirmation.

Auburn's work draws support from area businesses, as well. For example, employees from a Home Depot location in nearby Opelika are getting into the program this summer. They're donating their time and labor to help upgrade the grounds for the dogs at Auburn, including building a new obstacle course that puppies born into the program can use in their first few months of life.

These same puppies, several years from now, could be the ones that sports fans see moving around their favorite team's stadium or arena, making sure the venue is safe.

The comparison for program director Waggoner, when asked about these animals' stock, is perhaps not surprisingly to another "animal." The durability and skill set of the Vapor Wake dogs makes him think of one of Auburn's greatest Tigers on the athletic field.

"[They are] the Bo Jacksons of detection dogs," he said.