

# Dog Trainer's Companion More Than Pretty Face

By Tonya Warren

She's fairly new to the Waco scene, and she's gorgeous. Soulful brown eyes, long legs and a winsome personality make her hard to resist. She doesn't complain about being in Home Depot on a Saturday evening, and a bit of barbecue and a taste of ice cream make her an inexpensive date. Oh, and she's in church every Sunday.

Meet Szva (pronounced "Zeeva"). Her American Kennel Club-registered name is Szva Kodiak Pride Haus Von Leerburg. Alan White, a former U.S. Marine security guard, is her proud owner and trainer.

White's love of German shepherds began as a freshman in high school. In 1972 he enlisted in the Air Force after donating his own dog for military duty. In his military career he hoped one day to work with canines in whatever path would open up for him.

While a short stint in the Air Force allowed him the opportunity to work with a canine unit, White said he wanted a "more disciplined" life, and received a military transfer to the Marine Corps. He was a flight engineer for 18 months; when he turned 21 he was eligible to become a Marine security guard and work with canines.

## Service Home, Abroad

White volunteered for a U.S. Embassy position and was chosen based on his experience in handling and training military dogs. He worked with five dogs over an 11-year period as a bomb/explosives dog handler at U.S. embassies in several countries and the consulate in Canada.

White later became part of Marine Helicopter Squadron One in Quantico, Virginia, working with canines to



Alan White credits his German shepherd Szva with saving his life this spring after he passed out in his home due to low blood sugar. Photo by Ken Sury.

protect officials on Marine One aircraft.

After leaving military life, White doubted working with canines would provide enough income to support a family, so he pursued other job opportunities. But his love and enjoyment of dogs never wavered.

White eventually had a personal protection dog, a German shepherd named Otto. Otto was staying with a

family in Houston while White was in Waco trying to decide if he wanted to make this area his new home.

While at a park in Houston, a man attempted to kidnap the family's youngest daughter, White said. Otto tore at the man's leg in thwarting the would-be kidnapper. But the man pulled out a pistol and shot the dog. Both Otto and the would-be kidnapper

died before law enforcement arrived, White said.

White's voice quavered while talking about Otto.

"It took me a year and a half before I could open up my heart to another dog," he said.

Eventually, he shared his story on Facebook. German shepherd dog pages. Suzanne Williams, a dog breeder in Blanco, reached out and told White she had a dog for him.

He went to Blanco, where Williams presented him with either Szva or an 18-month-old puppy. She told White that Szva's potential was being wasted on her property.

White said he chose Szva for her personality and disposition. He felt she was up to the task of assisting him as he'd recently learned he needed a service dog to calm his panic attacks in crowds.

He provided Szva basic and advanced training. "She's just done wonderful with it," he said.

"I do get anxious in very large crowds," he added. "I have had panic attacks. When it's anxiety, she picks up on it and starts licking my face to bring me back. When it's panic, she'll take that big paw of hers and start slapping at me."

Not only does Szva provide White with emotional support, she sprang into action this spring when White passed out from his blood sugar being too low.

White had not been previously diagnosed with diabetes, but late one night last spring, he passed out in the kitchen. Szva continuously pawed him until he awoke and was able to call 911.

With Szva at her owner's side, the ambulance took them to the local ER where White's blood sugar was stabilized before he was released home.

White said he's certain he wouldn't be alive today without Szva awakening him that night so he could make that 911 call.

## Canine Evaluator

White is a certified dog trainer and AKC evaluator who knows an obedient, well-trained dog is a pleasure to its owner and the community at large. He



Alan White and Szva went to visit veterans at the VA Hospital on Christmas morning. Photo by Alan White.

teaches a two-part AKC Canine Good Citizen Program through his business, WhiteHaven Canine Evaluators, where owners learn responsible dog ownership and the dogs learn good manners.

Urban Canine Good Citizen training teaches dogs how to navigate situations in public settings, such as an elevator or public transportation. Some apartment complexes and condos are requiring dog owners to provide proof of at least basic dog training completion before being allowed on their rental properties, he said.

This training offers another layer of legal protection as owners learn how to handle their trained dog in public areas, White added.

An obedient, well-trained dog also

can serve others, he said, as Szva does during visits to the Doris Miller Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center. White and Szva visit with VA patients there every Wednesday, logging 25-30 hours a month of volunteer time with veterans.

When told Szva has a great life for a dog, White looked at Szva, and with a chuckle said, "That's not a dog. That's a princess." <sup>(A7)</sup>

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