



Pima County Attorney's Office

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 18 2012

COURTHOUSE DOG PROGRAM COMES TO PIMA COUNTY

TUCSON, ARIZONA – Pima County has its first Courthouse Dog.

Russell, a beautiful two-year old golden retriever, will assist children and other vulnerable victims of crime cope with the stress and trauma that can accompany victimization.

“Russell will help provide a warm, loving and non-judgmental environment for victims to help them through what can be very dark and scary times.” said Pima County Attorney Barbara LaWall. “We’re delighted to have him as the newest member of our victim services team.”

Bringing Russell to Tucson was a joint effort by the Pima County Attorney's Office and the Southern Arizona Children's Advocacy Center (SACAC). He is a fully trained facility dog from Assistance Dogs of the West, an accredited nonprofit service dog organization located in New Mexico.

Pima County joins the growing national movement of prosecutorial and nonprofit agencies throughout the U.S. to incorporate facility dogs to provide support for victims of crime.

Courthouse Dogs have been in place since 2004, with facility dogs like Russell in offices in Colorado, Mississippi, Texas, Florida, Maryland and Washington. The Courthouse Dog Program has also been endorsed by the National District Attorney's Association as the best practice in this field.

Courthouse Dogs are professionally trained canines that assist people during the investigations and prosecutions of crime by providing silent comfort and support to children and vulnerable victims and witnesses. Their presence can decrease the emotional trauma during stressful criminal justice proceedings by reducing blood pressure, stress, and anxiety.

Russell's primary duty will be assisting children at the SACAC to provide support to children before, during and after the forensic interview process and he will also be working at the Pima County Attorney's Office and the Pima County Superior and Juvenile Courthouses when needed.

"Providing stellar victim services is an important piece to prosecution that I take very seriously," LaWall said. "The reality is abused children or domestic violence victims are often too afraid or ashamed to confront their abusers and when you add law enforcement and court rooms it can be a terrifying experience. These dogs help assure victims they are not alone and are safe."

To ensure a successful launch, Ellen O'Neill-Stephens and Celeste Walsen, trained staff from the National Courthouse Dogs Program, will be in Tucson to provide the final phase of training and technical assistance.

Funding for the Courthouse Dogs Program was obtained solely from assets seized from criminal enterprises.

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