

## Security dog makes his final rounds

After 8 years, canine heads into retirement

By Kate Nolan

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**SCOTTSDALE** — Blaku is as equipped to nuzzle your face as rip off your arm, depending on which order his handler, Jim Sullivan, gives.

Last week, Sullivan let the 11-year-old German shepherd follow his heart, which fortunately led to an orgy of dog nuzzling at Scottsdale Healthcare Osborn as Blaku made final patrols of the 400,000-square-foot hospital.

On Friday, the Czech-born shepherd retired from the hospital after almost eight years on its security team.

As the two wandered through the emergency department one day last week, Sullivan, 41, said something in Czech, and Blaku calmly sat down.

Every time he'd say it, the dog would obey and, in turn, hospital staff would crumple to the floor, wipe away their tears and hug the 95-pound K-9 star.

On Tuesday, the emergency department threw him a farewell party.

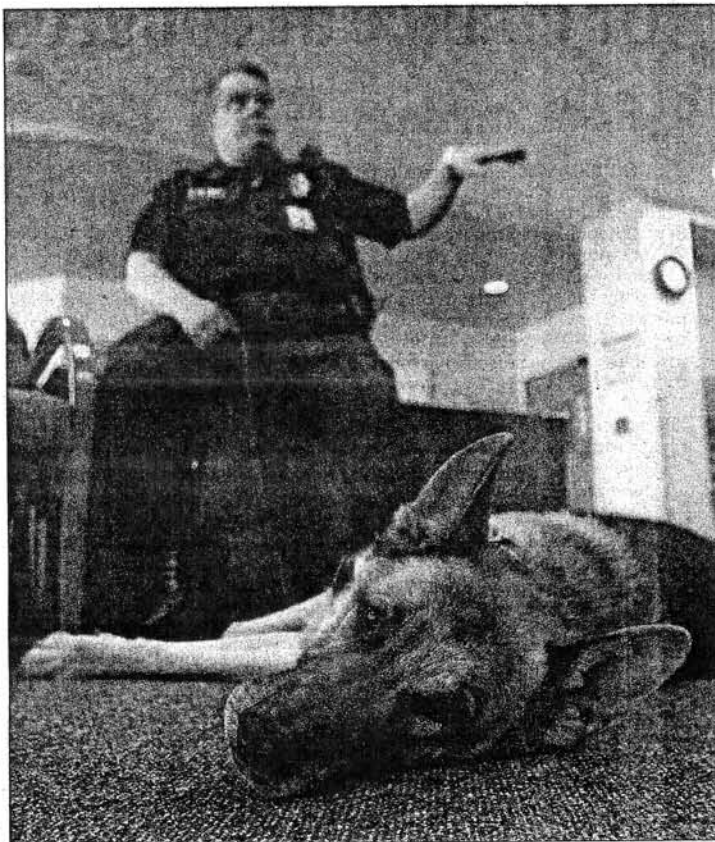
Blaku's departure is such a blow that the hospital is throwing another party Thursday for the entire staff.

Blaku was one of the hospital's first two security dogs. The other, Canto, retired three years ago.

Almost eight years ago, Sullivan picked up Blaku for the first time, and the duo have worked and lived together ever since, Sullivan commanding Blaku in 21 Czech terms, and Blaku sleeping in a large crate in Sullivan's Mesa bedroom.

Blaku snores, Sullivan said. The hospital also employs a dog that takes commands in German and another in Mandarin Chinese.

Sullivan said Blaku has been an ideal security dog. He knows how to sober up drunken emergency-room patients



PHOTOS BY CHERYL EVANS/THE REPUBLIC

His growl could sober up a drunk in the emergency room at Scottsdale Healthcare Osborn. But deep down, security dog Blaku has a heart of gold. He retired last week amid hugs, tears and a party. **See a video:** Blaku in action, [scottsdale.azcentral.com](http://scottsdale.azcentral.com).

with a wolfish growl but has never had to bite anyone.

One bad guy hiding in a hospital building got out fast when Blaku was sent in on a search detail.

He won fifth place one year in the building search event at the annual Des-

ert Dog K-9 security dog competition in Scottsdale.

Blaku has a special affection for an emergency nurse named Patty Root. Anyone who touches her needs Blaku's OK, Sullivan said.

When they made the rounds last

week, the love poured down.

"Bye, honey, I'm gonna miss you," registration assistant Lena Styles said, embracing Blaku.

Suzette Herrington, a clinical nurse educator, cradled Blaku's head.

"Mama's gonna miss you. I'll give you my address so you can come see me," she told him. Herrington is one of the dog's favorite humans.

Next, Blaku called on a patient.

It's hard to believe, but a patient once told Sullivan: "You get that dog out of here or I'll bite you."

Jake Urschel, 76, wanted to talk with Blaku.

The Scottsdale man was in the hospital having radiation treatments and needed some fun.

"Ah, he's nice. I've had dogs all my life. This is normal for me," Urschel said, as Blaku planted his paws on the mattress a few inches from Urschel.

Jake's wife, Boots, worried about Blaku's future.

"Retirement isn't really much fun. You miss all the people and activity," Boots told him.

But the farewell was inevitable.

"He's slowing down a bit. We want him to have a life outside the hospital," Sullivan said.

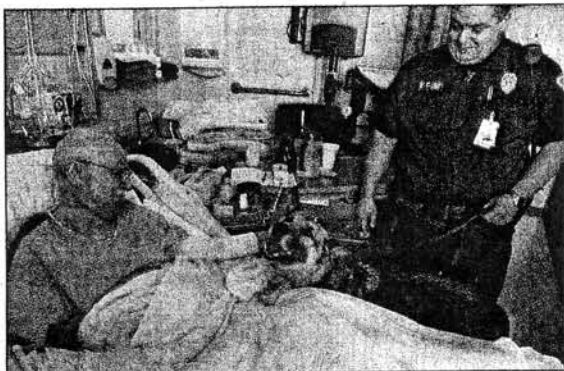
So last Saturday, Sullivan and Blaku came home from their regular night shift at the hospital, gathered Blaku's rubber-toy collection and headed for Sullivan's brother's home nearby.

Blaku is now settled into a family with two kids, who have known him for years. Sullivan plans to take him out weekly.

"Blaku's a family member. When I'm sick, he's there for me. He's almost like my mate. But it hasn't hit me yet," Sullivan said, his voice choking, shortly before Blaku's departure.

Saturday afternoon Sullivan was to pick up a new service companion.

The two were to begin training this week with Scottsdale Police Department's dog wizard Owen Keefe.



Blaku and his handler, Jim Sullivan, kept patient Jake Urschel amused as he awaited radiation therapy.

### Desert Dog Police K-9 Trials

The Arizona Law Enforcement Canine association hosts a competition featuring police, military and private-security K-9 teams from around the Southwest.

Events will include searches, an obstacle course, tactical obedience, handler protection and narcotic/explosive detection.

**When:** 9 a.m.-4 p.m. April 12-13.

**Where:** Scottsdale Stadium, 7408 E. Osborn Road, Scottsdale (northeast of Osborn and Drinkwater Boulevard).

**Details:** 602-509-2498, [www.desertdogk9trials.com](http://www.desertdogk9trials.com); \$1 donation requested at gate.



Blaku