

## Protecting the halls is the *leashed* he could do

By Jess Hess and Olivia Lighty

Perry Meridian has a new student walking the halls — and he walks on four legs.

Perry's fuzzy canine guest, Brody, a rescued 9-year-old Golden Retriever, has been with Officer Douglas Rather for 7 years. Rather says, "He was bought by another police department, and I was his handler. They retired him last October to me."

Brody is a narcotics tracking dog, which means he does article and narcotic finds. The pup has been at Perry for about three weeks. Brody has not been sent on any searches yet because he is still becoming accustomed to the school and students.

"We've never been assigned to a school before as a team, so this is new to us," says Rather.

Brody's experience is going well so far, and Rather thinks that "having Brody here kind of breaks that barrier between the officer and the student. It's more inviting for a student to come talk to us if we have Brody."

Junior Kate Rogers, who tracks the dog down any chance she gets, agrees.

"Saying 'hi' to him when I see him in the hallway always cheers me up," she says, "having a dog at school makes the environment a bit less stressful."

**"My trainer goes to pounds and tests the dogs and sees if they test right for this line of work. If so, she'll turn them into working dogs and give them a really good life."**

**-Officer Douglas Rather**

Rogers also notes how much more comfortable she would be reporting a public safety problem to the police officers because of Brody.

"Because I speak with him almost everyday to give Brody a quick pet, it would make approaching him with an issue much easier."

Junior Zoe White also agrees with Rogers and how being around Brody opens up communication.

"He's adorable and so sweet," White says, "I wish I could take him."

Despite the human friends Brody has made at Perry, he remains most loyal to his best friend Officer Rather.

"He follows me around the house."

The pair train together 12 hours a month, testing Brody's abilities to find hidden objects. Occasionally, they'll test him with a blank room where there is nothing hidden, and other times they'll hide something and have him find it.

Rather has been in the police force

for 18 years. He was on the road prior to that, and out west for 6 years. When he returned to Indianapolis, his department wanted to start a K-9 program.

"I was volunteering big-time for it. 'Pick me! Pick me!'" Rather said.

Then, they settled on Brody, and the two have been together ever since, he says.

For Rather's department, the process to find a police dog is simple.

"My trainer goes to pounds and tests the dogs to see if they're right for this work. If so, she'll turn them into working dogs and give them a really good life."

Brody is always in a good mood and that has helped the officer be more optimistic about his job.

"When I put my uniform on and come to work, I sometimes dread it like you guys sometimes dread school. He loves coming to work because it's play time for him!"

**"Saying 'hi' to him when I see him in the hallway always cheers me up."**  
**-Junior Kate Rogers**

After a day of work, the pair return home where Brody continues his play time with the other two dogs in his family home; Rather's wife has a therapy dog in her office, and they have a family dog. Rather says the dogs are best friends and run around the house and play.



Brody rests while Officer Rather explains the duties of a drug dog and how himself and Brody became partners (Photo by Olivia Lighty).



Left: Officer Douglas Rather poses with Brody after demonstrating a drug search.

Right: Office Rather prepares Brody for his locker search. Brody, knowing that he is about to start working, waits for Rather's command ("sook") before sniffing the set of lockers. After Brody sniffed the lockers, Rather explained that when Brody finds a substance, he sits in front of it and stares.

(Photos by Olivia Lighty)

