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**NORTH KINGSTOWN** – Two weeks ago, North Kingstown firefighter Lt. Michael LeClair and the department's search and rescue dog, a black lab named Rudi, passed the Type II Disaster Certification. They were one of five other canine teams from the Rhode Island Urban Search and Rescue Task Force to receive the certification. The test was held at the Lakehurst Naval Air Station in Lakehurst, N.J. and was sponsored by the New Jersey Urban Search and Rescue Task Force. It was conducted by personnel from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Other teams came from New York, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama and Idaho.

"The Type II is a first level national disaster certification. We're on a database of nationally certified canine teams set up for possible deployment to natural or manmade disasters across the country. This will give the North Kingstown fire department a new level of expertise and credibility in the area of search and rescue," said LeClair.

Type II consists of five elements. The first was an obedience test, which included a human and canine aggression test, emergency stop, off-leash heel and long down stay, where the dogs are placed in line five feet apart and must stay in the down position with the owners out of sight for five minutes. Next was the agility test. The dog had to complete a walk across an unstable and uneven surface, climb a ladder to an elevation of eight feet, walk across a plank eight feet above the ground, crawl through a right angle tunnel and negotiate a teeter totter. The third element is an alert test. A person is placed in a bark box, which is a wooden box with scent holes along the bottom. The dog is required to stay and bark at the scent holes for 30 seconds. "This teaches the dog to bark at the scent source without being able to see the victim," said Leclair. The fourth element is direction and control, where four platforms were set up in a field in the shape of a baseball diamond. LeClair stood at the home plate and had to direct Rudi to each base. The last element was the rubble search. Two people are hidden in a 5,000 square-foot rubble pile. The dog is initially sent to work independently in finding the victim. The dog can also work with the owner in finding the second victim and both victims must be found within 15 minutes.



"The Type II is an all or nothing test. You fail one element or even a portion of the obedience or agility and you fail the entire test," he added.

Rudi was certified for wilderness rescue last January and since then, has responded to and been deployed for five searches for missing persons, three in North Kingstown and two in other communities. As of yet, they haven't worked outside of Rhode Island. The duo will now begin training for their Type I certification next year. This certification is the most advanced search and rescue certificate available. This type of certification is for rubble search only. There'll be two rubble piles. Hidden in the piles are four to six victims. Within the piles, there'll be several distractions which will include food, clothing, live or dead animals. "The biggest part of training for this type of certification is working with the distractions. Try teaching a lab to keep working instead of eating a cheeseburger. I'll also be working on building his endurance to keep working to find multiple victims," he added.

LeClair would like to thank the generosity of Debra Scott of Dogwood Labradors, who donated Rudi for the purpose of search and rescue. LeClair has also just received a grant from the Walmart Foundation for \$1,000 to help cover the cost of food and veterinary care. "It's only with the generosity of people within our community that the North Kingstown Fire Department is able to continue to provide this kind of specialized service. And we thank them tremendously," he added. Rudi has been with the department for about a year and half. Having a search and rescue dog costs the department no money and Rudi's care is paid for by donations.

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