

K-9 puppies are now pooches

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Cayenne and Romeo's first litter has done such a good job with their training to become drug-detection dogs for Maryland prisons that another litter of prison puppies is on the way.

An ultrasound was conducted Nov. 15 at Mid-Atlantic Veterinary Hospital, determining that Cayenne was carrying at least nine black Labrador puppies, said Maj. Peter Anderson, K-9 commander for the Maryland Division of Correction.

Cayenne gave birth to 12 puppies shortly before Thanksgiving 2006. The Herald-Mail has checked in periodically to see how the dogs are growing and learning.

Six of the 12 puppies are the first to be trained by the K-9 staff to become drug-detection dogs. The effort to breed and train their own drug-detection dogs is expected to save the state money, Anderson said.

The six puppies from the first litter began informal training at 10 weeks of age and have learned to detect at least one type of drug without visual assistance from their handler, Anderson said. They are learning to detect marijuana, heroin and cocaine.

Those puppies - now dogs weighing 60 to 80 pounds - will begin a 10-week formal drug-detection program with other dogs in January, Anderson said. The training they have received during the past year will put them ahead of other dogs in their class.

At least one of the six littermates will work at the prison complex south of Hagerstown, Anderson said. The first group of trainees is expected to go on the job around April 1.