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By Dave Wagner, KIRO 7 News

Outside a nondescript building at the San Juan County Fairgrounds, you can hear dogs barking with anticipation. They are doggedly determined to sniff out a devastating disease that is changing the life of Mark Hopkins. "Everything takes longer. The hands are shaking trying to do something, trying to eat, difficulty swallowing. It affects gait, the way you walk," said Hopkins who has Parkinson's disease.

Since 2016, a nonprofit called Parkinson's Alert Dogs, or PADs, has been training canines to recognize the smell of Parkinson's disease. "They have about 295 million more odor receptors than you do," Lisa Holt, who is the program director for PADs, said of the dogs. The idea was conceived after hearing of a nurse in Scotland who is able to detect the scent of a person with Parkinson's, even before that person is diagnosed by doctors.

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"Parkinson's disease starts 10 to 15 years before tremors and it can't even be clinically diagnosed before tremors. So, if we chase it upstream, that's where the cause is and, if you can get to the cause, you can get to the cure. That's what I believe," said Holt.

On the day KIRO 7 visited, a T-shirt worn by a 62-year-old woman with Parkinson's disease was placed in one of four canisters. One by one, dogs were released into the room to find the T-shirt with the scent of the disease. Their success is remarkable. During their first round, the dogs were 100% accurate, and a cube of turkey was used as a reward. "It takes about 400 exposures for the dogs to even begin to recognize Parkinson's disease. That's a lot. In any other detection training, it would be well under 100," said Holt.

Ella is one of 22 canines being trained. "Her whole world is her nose. It's her job. She just has so much joy. The work is everything to her. Yeah, turkey's great, but it's the job. It's the work," said her owner, Katy Barsamian.

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The results are recorded by a volunteer. University of Washington analytical chemist Dr. Jack Bell is investigating what the dogs are smelling. "We think this is in the odor because it is coming off of those T-shirts from the skin of the patients. Definitely, they're cold, volatile, organic chemicals," said Bell.

Barbara Wright has two standard poodles, Sasha and Mia. They have a nose for Parkinson's disease.

They spend four days a week being trained. "Oh, they love to work. They just love to work. They're always anxious to get into the building and do their job and anxious to get out so they can line up again. I think they'll really make a difference," said Wright.

Help did not come quickly enough for David Haugen, who died in 1984. His wife, Carolyn, brings her dog Rowan to sniff out the disease that killed her husband. "It's sort of a ray of hope that, maybe with what the dogs are doing, they will be able to help, as they have done with other diseases, help people that are suffering."

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Among the dogs in training is a basset hound named Bertie. She is 100% blind, but her nose is incredible. "Her nose is more important to her than her eyesight. Once I put her harness on and I tell her we're going to PADs, she'll trot to the car and she barks like that the whole way here," said Bertie's owner, Leah McConnell.

While the dogs appear to relish the experience, owner Sarah Shorett said she gets something from the experience as well. "The idea that I'm helping somebody down the road," said Shorett.

Hopkins lives across the street from the training. He said he watches in awe, hoping for a cure. "I love dogs and hate Parkinson's," said Hopkins.

Click [here](#) for more information on PADs.
