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Metro de
Fax: (973
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Woodbridge Patrolman Mike Dalia, left, embraces a tearful Sgt. Dave Kendrick after Kendrick's former K-9 partner, Magnum, was inducted posthumously yesterday into the New Jersey Animal Hall of Fame.

Tales of heroic feats land horse, five dogs in the Hall of Fame

By Kelly Heyboer
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

The cameras, the applause, the "hero" title — Blackball took it all in stride yesterday.

The 10-year-old Labrador-husky mix, who fearlessly took a bullet in the head fighting off a mugger in Newark a few years ago, sauntered on stage yesterday and accepted his place in the New Jersey Animal Hall of Fame.

"Every day is a gift."

— SANDRA RIGHTMEYER, of life with Ranger

"He's used to being in the spotlight. He's a ham," said Eric Burgos, a senior at the New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark and a member of the fraternity house where Blackball is the resident hero.

In July 1995, two Pi Kappa Phi brothers were sitting on the front porch of their Martin Luther King Boulevard house when a gunman walked up and demanded their money and jewelry.

Blackball, the frat house dog, ran down the steps, out an open door and lunged at the gunman just as he fired.

The mugger fled and has never been caught, but Blackball survived a .380-caliber bullet between the eyes. The one-time stray was hailed

yesterday as a model guard dog.

"He really is Super Dog," said Suzanne Smith, chairwoman of the state Veterinary Medical Association's Animal Hall of Fame.

Blackball, who was named in the hero category, was inducted into the Hall of Fame along with four other dogs and a horse during the association's third annual luncheon in Long Branch yesterday.

The ceremony honors the bond between humans and animals and celebrates animal achievements that are rarely formally recognized. Animals are nominated in one of four categories — hero, professional, therapy and companion — by their veterinarians.

Ranger, a mixed-breed dog who was adopted at a shelter the day before she was scheduled to be put down, was inducted in the therapy category for her work with the elderly. Despite her own health problems, the former search-and-rescue dog makes frequent visits to residents of the Tally-Ho Sarah Frances Nursing Home in Boonton Township with her trademark stuffed animal in her mouth, said her owner, Sandra Rightmeyer.

"Every day is a gift," Rightmeyer said of her life with the dog.

In the companion category, a three-legged pit bull mix was honored for coming back from horrific



Pumpkin, a 4-year-old pit bull mix with only three legs, peers out from under the banquet table at yesterday's ceremony. Pumpkin was among five dogs and a horse inducted into the Hall of Fame.

PHOTOS BY ANDREW MILLS

injuries to become a sweet-tempered family dog. Pumpkin was found abandoned on New York City's FDR Drive in 1994. Both her legs were crushed, her pelvis was cracked and

her jaw was broken when Deborah Cullere of Demarest decided to adopt her from a local shelter.

The winner in the professional category, a Labrador named Link,

was not able to make the ceremony, because he was in a hospital in Boston undergoing treatment for a cancerous tumor in his nose. His blind

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By Lisa
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