

Fitz, The Courthouse Facility Dog, Makes Every Day "The Best"

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EDWARDSVILLE - A 5-year-old black Labrador Retriever - Fitz - has had an amazing impact in his time at the Madison County Courthouse in Edwardsville.

Fitz arrived at the courthouse in 2019 from Duo Dogs in St. Louis as a fully trained courthouse facility dog. Courthouse facility dogs assist litigants, victims, kids, and families during stressful stages of the legal process. They can be used in case management, forensic interviews, and criminal or civil proceedings and are handled by professionals in these fields.

The dogs are specially trained by assistance dog organizations that are members of Assistance Dogs International. Fitz's handlers are Tiffany Brooks and Emily Bell.

Madison County State's Attorney Thomas Haine is a dog lover himself and in his time at the courthouse, he has come to also love Fitz. He said Fitz is a tremendous help with victims and kids during stressful parts of the legal process.

Here is some additional background on Fitz from Victim Services Coordinator Tiffany Brooks and Assistant State's Attorney Emily Bell.

"In 2020, we were working with a 9-year-old victim who was so scared she wouldn't even come into the courtroom and when she came in, she cried," the two said. "At our second meeting, we introduced her to Fitz. She quickly warmed up to him and actually started to enjoy coming in and meeting with us. With the help of Fitz, she was able to walk into the courtroom, get up on the witness stand, and tell her story. He helped her find her voice."

Brooks and Bell recalled another incident in 2019, shortly after the courthouse was blessed with Fitz's services.

"We were meeting regularly with the mother of a deceased victim," Brooks and Bell said. "These meetings were obviously very difficult for her, so we decided to introduce her to Fitz and this was the first time any of us saw her smile."

"After the jury announced the guilty verdict, she called Fitz over to her and said, 'we did it, Fitz, we actually did it.'"

Judge Schuette initiated the drive to obtain Fitz and she has said: "Fitz has been an amazing resource for children and adults in courtroom situations and those in need of

comfort and support. Oftentimes, the children in our courts are directly or indirectly involved in cases and we want them to just be kids and not worry about everything going on in the courtroom."

Chief Judge Bill Mudge has said this about Fitz: "We are grateful to Duo Dogs in St. Louis for Fitz's wonderful addition, the Madison County Bar Association for their financial support for our dog, and to Whisker Bones for helping to bathe and provide treats for him."

Fitz is so popular, that he has his own Facebook page. Often he is dressed to reflect different days and situations and he always seems happy about his attire.

This describes Fitz on the page: *"I work at the Madison County Courthouse as their Courthouse Facility Dog. I was specially trained by Duo Dogs, Inc in St. Louis, MO, to comfort those going through the court process."*

Duo Dogs is a national not-for-profit organization located at 10955 Linpage Place, St. Louis, Mo. For more information, contact duodogs.org.

One woman - Kathy Gillihan - provided a description of how most feel about the beloved courthouse dog - "Every day with Fitz is the Best Day! "





This is Fitz's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/Duo-Dog-Fitz-Courthouse-Facility-Dog-2688113351415036>