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German Shepherd Becomes First Russian Dog to Win Canine Loyalty Award

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Volk-Merkury with his handler. **mvd.ru**

A German Shepherd from St. Petersburg has become the first Russian dog to win an international canine loyalty prize for rescuing a girl from rape, Russian media reported this week.

Volk-Merkury, a 9-year-old police dog, was recognized for finding a 15-year-old girl who went missing on her way to her mother's work last September.

Volk-Merkury's handler Maria Koptseva started the search around the area where the girl's phone was last turned on, the Russian state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported.

After smelling the girl's pillowcase, Volk-Merkury followed the scent to an abandoned building where she was being held. A 36-year-old repeat offender who was preparing to rape the 15-year-old was arrested at the scene.

Volk-Merkury is the first Russian dog to win the International Dog Loyalty Award in its 60-year history. Eleven other dogs, all Italian, received prizes at the ceremony in the town of San Rocco Di Camogli in the Genoa province on Monday.

Volk-Merkury's story "didn't leave a single member of the jury indifferent," event organizer Sonia Gentoso told RIA Novosti.

"We're very glad that our award will go to Russia for the first time," Gentoso, who presented the award to Koptseva via live video link, said.

The International Dog Loyalty Award was inaugurated in 1962 in honor of Saint Roch, the patron saint of dogs who, according to legend, was cared for by a dog while he was ill from the plague in the 14th century.

The regional award gained national and then international status, with at least one prize given out to dogs from foreign countries every year.

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