



**Kuna, a five-year-old German Shepherd owned and trained by Brenda Walker, is featured in two episodes of the television series Tulsa King.**

# THE IDEAL DOG

## Oklahoma Canine Launches Acting Career in Tulsa King

by David Gallant | Photos courtesy of Brenda Walker

It was an economic boon for the state when the announcement came that the TV series *Tulsa King* would be filmed in Oklahoma. For most of 2021, the intention had been to film the series in Kansas. But thanks to the steadfast vision of Oklahoma Lieutenant Governor Matt Pinnell (who is also the state's first secretary of tourism and branding) and his staff, those plans changed.

The series — about a New York Mafia capo who is released from prison and whose boss exiles him to Tulsa to set up shop — is being filmed throughout the state, mostly in the Tulsa metro and Oklahoma City metro areas.

Shortly after the filming location was announced in February 2022, a statewide call went out to find a German Shepherd dog (GSD) to be in the series. The dog needed to be good-natured and cool-headed and have the stamina to endure long working hours and loud noises and put up with petting from strangers. In addition, the dog must learn to come when called by strangers, to track a scent, to bark when told, and to squat and pretend to poop on command.

### Finding Kuna

In early March 2022, Pamela Banks and Reride Smith of Reride Animal Talent visited Oklahoma to find a suitable dog for the series. They stopped by a dog wash in Edmond where Autumn Goforth, with Go Forth K9, was bathing her dogs. Banks commented on “how well-behaved the dogs were,” then mentioned that “she helped put dogs in movies” and described the type of dog she and Smith sought. After talking about dogs, Oklahoma, and the TV series, they exchanged contact information with Goforth.



Between scenes of *Tulsa King*, Kuna shares a bonding moment with Brian Shoop, who portrays her owner, Larry, in the TV series.

Walker had Smith show Kuna a piece of chicken jerky and call her from a distance. Of course, Kuna was happy to come running; she loves chicken jerky. After several more successful tests, including lots of hugs and playtime, Kuna received the part in the TV series. Filming with Kuna would begin in April 2022. As a bonus, Walker would be Kuna's trainer and animal wrangler on set.

### Kuna Starts Her TV Job

It was a chilly day in April when filming for Kuna's big day arrived.

Walker packed up Kuna and drove to a house in Oklahoma City near West Britton Road and North May Avenue in the Village, where scenes for the second episode of *Tulsa King* were being filmed. Walker and Kuna met Brian Shoop, who plays the part of dog owner Larry (he has no last name in the series and appears in only two episodes). His dog, played by Kuna, has a habit of pooping in a neighbor's yard.

In episode two, we see Kuna running from the yard of Armand (Manny) Truisi, played by Max Casella. Truisi sees a pile of dog poop and complains to Larry. Larry's response is, “How do you know it's my dog?”

To prepare for that scene, Kuna and Larry play ball, cuddle, and chase each other in the yard. Then Walker takes Kuna to Truisi's yard while Larry plays with the ball. “Kuna loves to play ball” and works herself into a tizzy trying to get to the ball — then Walker releases her to go back across the street.

Afterward, Goforth contacted her friend Brenda Walker, a breeder and trainer of GSDs who lives in Edmond. Goforth told Walker about the meeting and gave her Banks' contact information. Walker breeds German Shepherds that have “a loving temperament and are friendly to everyone they meet.” Several of her dogs have become service, therapy, and emotional support dogs. One outstanding trait of her dogs is that they are “versatile and happy being working dogs or being at home with their humans.”

The next day, Walker sent pictures of her German Shepherds to Banks, including a photo of Kuna, a five-year-old female. After seeing the images, Banks and another animal wrangler planned to meet Walker and her dogs. Walker didn't know hundreds of other GSD photos had been submitted, but the director of the show was interested in Kuna.

The weather was excellent when Smith and Banks came to screen-test Kuna.




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To get Kuna to stop and sniff the yard as though she is searching for just the right potty spot, Walker lays a track. She teaches tracking in Oklahoma City and is used to laying a track for Kuna to sniff around and follow. Walker lays the track by stomping her feet in a small square to disrupt the grass and then spreads treats on the ground. This time she adds a little deer urine to the grass where she wants Kuna to stop and poop — Kuna rolls in that.

After more practice runs, Walker takes Kuna and her walkie-talkie down the street until it is time to shoot Kuna's big scene. When Walker hears the walkie-talkie squawk, "We are ready for the animal wranglers," she gathers up Kuna's leash and returns.

Just as they had practiced, Larry stood in his yard bouncing the ball to get Kuna excited. Walker releases Kuna to run toward Larry. Kuna is fast and takes off at full speed to get the ball. After a few repeats, it is time to film the last scene, in which Kuna stays with Larry and walks out of camera view.

Then Walker and Kuna hop into the car and leave for home. It has been a long, fun-filled day, and they are tired. Kuna sleeps all the way home. Kuna's next big appearance is in episode four, scheduled to be filmed in June 2022.

### Kuna Films Another Episode

In episode four, Truisi arrives home and accidentally steps in dog poop. Angrily, he walks over to his neighbor Larry, stuffs the poop-covered shoe in his face, and a fight starts. Kuna sees this through the window and starts to jump and bark frantically.

To be clear, Kuna doesn't poop in any of the scenes, but to make it look as though she does, Walker taught Kuna to squat during the weeks between episodes two and four. She started with a typical sit training and changed it so Kuna would stop in a squat position. It took time to teach the squat because Kuna naturally wanted to sit. Then during those off-weeks, Walker taught Kuna to walk backward, wipe, and kick her feet in case those tricks were needed in the filming.

When Walker and Kuna arrived on set to film episode four, the director had them repeat what they had done in episode two to get Kuna to run across the street. Once Kuna crosses the road to Truisi's yard, she stops to sniff the track Walker has put down. When Walker is out of camera view, she gives the squat command to make it appear as if Kuna is pooping in Truisi's yard.

In Kuna's last scene, she barks in a window when she sees Truisi beating up Larry, who appears to have dog poop on his face. When the fight starts, Walker, out of view of the camera, starts to play with another dog. That always makes Kuna jealous, and she barks. The timing was perfect.

For episode four, Walker and Kuna were on the set for 12 hours, and it rained off and on. But there were lots of food, soda, water, and even doggie treats for Kuna. By the end of the day, they were tired, and once again, Kuna slept while being chauffeured home. It was a great day.

Tune into Paramount Plus to watch Tulsa King. Keep an eye out for future casting calls. Who knows? You or your dog could land a part in the next blockbuster TV series! 🐾