

KENNEL CLUBS HELP FUND PURCHASE OF PATROL DOGS THROUGH AKC PROGRAM

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AKC Reunite

A police dog nearing retirement age caused concern for the Riverside (California) Police Department. The K-9 officer protected policemen, caught criminals, and located dangerous contraband.

Losing the dog would deliver a blow to the department, but with the cost of police dogs averaging \$10,000 to \$12,000, purchasing new K9 officers would be a huge obstacle for the department.

“Due to budget cuts and the city and department looking at ways to save money, it is hard to continue programs like the K-9 unit,” Riverside Police Officer Jeff Cleary said.

But today, the force has a new K9 officer on duty, thanks to the Kennel Club of Riverside and the AKC Reunite Adopt a K-9 Cop Program.

The program brings kennel clubs together with their police and sheriff’s departments to finance the purchase of dogs for their areas. Through

Supporting a K9 unit is a tangible way a dog club can give back to its community.

AKC Reunite Adopt a K-9 Cop, kennel clubs raise funds to help the police department. AKC Reunite matches that amount up to \$5,000. The funds are given to the police department, which selects, purchases, trains, handles, and cares for

the dog. As part of accepting the grant, law enforcement agencies agree to display the AKC Reunite logo on the K9 officer’s patrol car.

Two-year-old Belgian Malinois, Vego, has teamed with

Cleary to patrol the streets of Riverside and will soon be cross-trained in explosives detection.

“Public support and assistance in purchasing dogs is tremendous,” Cleary said. “Our police dogs are a great asset to the department.”

“The Kennel Club of Riverside has had a close relationship with its police department for many years so when we heard about the grant program, members wanted to help,” Delegate Sylvia Thomas said.

The kennel club has supported the police with donations, and the department’s K9 unit conducts demonstrations and makes appearances at the club’s dog shows and public events. The K9 handlers often attend the club’s quarterly meetings to update members about the dogs’ work.

“Every member in our club is in full agreement that this relationship may be the most important one our club has,” Thomas said. “While we donate to several other very worthy entities like AKC Humane Fund, Canine Health Foundation, AKC Legislative Committee, Take the Lead, the KCR - UC Davis Veterinary School Scholarship and others, our donation and significantly, our relationship with the police K9 unit, is the one that makes us all beam with pride.”

AKC Reunite, an affiliate of the American Kennel Club, is the largest non-profit pet identification and recovery service provider in the United States. It already operated a fund for search and rescue dogs when it expanded to include police dogs in 2013.

Following her loss of K9 Officer Baro from cancer, Newtown (CT) Police Officer Felicia Figol be-



came the first recipient of a dog through Adopt a K-9 Cop.

AKC Board Member Chris Sweetwood, Delegate of the Trap Falls Kennel Club, was manning a booth at an Obedience competition when he spotted Figol and Matt Hayes, another Newtown Police officer, walking across the grounds. Sweetwood and Hayes served together in Iraq, and so they stopped to chat and the topic of Figol's dog came up.

"This was shortly after the Sandy Hook school tragedy, and the police department had spent a lot of funding so it had no future reserve for a new dog," Sweetwood said. "I told them, 'Let me see what I can do.' I knew that AKC Reunite had a fund for search and rescue dogs, so I talked to the president, Tom Sharp, about extending the program for police dogs."

Figol filled out a grant application, and not long after, the Trap Falls Kennel Club presented the Newtown Police Department with \$14,000. The experience led to the establishment of the Adopt a K-9 Cop Program. As a result, nearly 20 departments around the country have welcomed K9 officers to their forces.

Sweetwood now serves as the ambassador for the program and acts as the liaison between law enforcement and kennel clubs.

"It is a great way to assist our local police departments who could not afford to purchase new police dogs and get the kennel clubs involved with their departments for mutual support," he said.

In September 2013, a 1½ year old German Shepherd arrived and became Figol's new partner. "He had the name of Geo, but we had just experienced Sandy Hook, so I named him Saint Michael. He was a great dog. He trained and certified in seven weeks. When not on duty, he was good with everyone, great with children. Sometimes I would wonder if he was a police dog when he was off duty."

"The benefit of a dog is huge," Figol said. Most K9 officers are dual purpose, meaning they can provide detection skills for drugs or explosives, plus are patrol dogs who can subdue and apprehend suspects.

"Take for instance tonight," Figol said recently, "we have four or five men on duty. Our town is 62

square miles with a population of 30,000 – that is not a lot of cops. But one dog is equivalent to having an additional five men on the shift. The minute I bring out the dog in any force-related situation, 90 percent of the time we have compliance. They say, 'We do not want to mess with the dog'."

AKC Reunite has a history of giving back to the communities that it serves. Its Canine Support and Relief Fund has donated more than \$7 million since 2001 for disaster preparedness and relief causes that impact the nation's pets. AKC Reunite also provides free recovery service enroll-



Office Mike Tollen Hillsborough (NC) Police Dept. and Jet

ment for all active service, military, and law enforcement K9 dogs.

"After the events of 9/11, AKC Reunite's charge to support working K9s became a reality. Over the years, we donated \$700,000 in grants to search and rescue organizations and then became aware of the very real budget struggles police department K9 units face to support the safety of their communities," said Tom Sharp, President



Riverside PD's dog, Vego, purchased with AKC Reunite Grant and KCR combined funds.

and CEO of AKC Reunite.

The Hillsborough (NC) Police Department has K9 Officer Jet, a German Shepherd, thanks to the support of the Durham Kennel Club. The club raised \$6,000, so with the AKC matching grant, the department received \$11,000 for Jet's purchase.

"One of our members had spoken to an officer on the street about needs they had. Cpl. Scott Foster said one of their two K9 officers was dealing with health issues and would need to retire early," said Linda Wozniak, Delegate of the Durham Kennel Club. "Hillsborough PD, like many police departments, is unable to raise monies directly due to town and municipality codes."

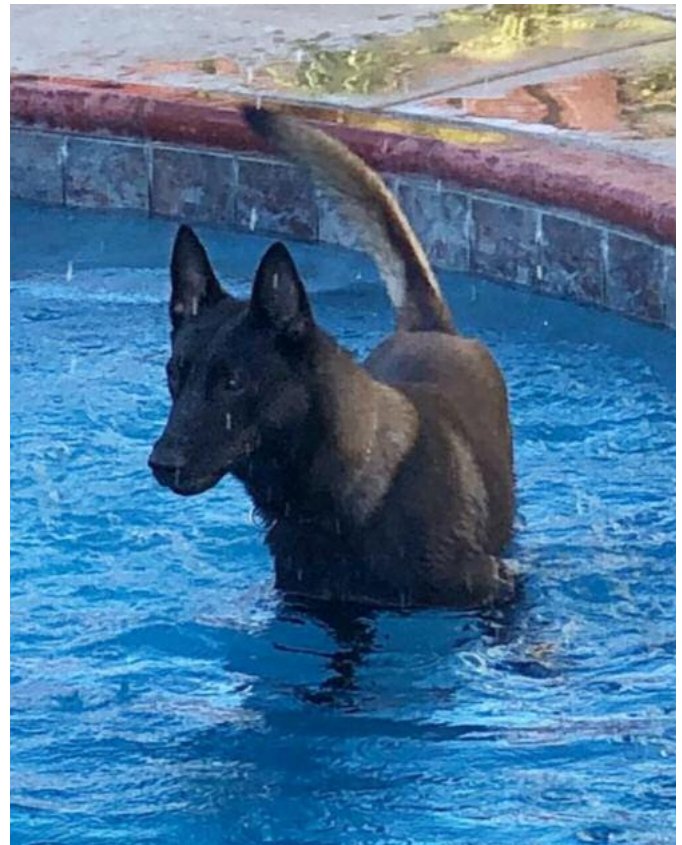
In addition to preventing crime, police dogs provide an invaluable way to connect law enforcement with the community. Cleary said, "Many times, the K9 officers will stop and connect with at-risk youths during a normal patrol shift. The police dogs make it easier to connect with these youths in a positive way. Through these positive interactions, the K9 handlers and police dogs help build a bridge of trust between the police department and the community."

Thomas said she encourages all kennel clubs to forge partnerships with local law enforcement as the benefits are many for both sides.

"Supporting a K9 unit is a tangible way a dog club can give back to its community. It is a source of pride within our club and when we consider our annual donations, it is the one that we never falter on and one that always receives the biggest annual donation, which is never less than \$5,000 and, in some years, has been as much as \$10,000..." she said. "Another collateral benefit is the relationship has broadened to include family members. Some officers have brought their families to the dog show to visit us. It's become a family event and part of our club's legacy to the community."

For more information:

<https://www.akcreunite.org/k9>



Riverside's new K9, Vego, enjoying some pool time.