

THE DIFFERENCE MAKERS ARE HERE

ADOPT-A-COP, A BOLD STEP

By Dr. Carmen Battaglia

Records dating back to the 1600s show that support for local law enforcement agencies has come from many sources. The talents of private agencies and individuals have helped to produce many of the advancements we see in modern crime prevention today. From the earliest days of law enforcement, canines were used as a working partner of police officers in the field. These officer-dog teams distinguished themselves in search and rescue efforts, cadaver searches, apprehensions and the discovery of illegal substances. It was the canine's loyalty and their keen sense of smell and willingness to work day and night that proved to be a valuable asset needed in the fight against crime. Today their involvement has been universally accepted as one of the best tools that police have to help protect rural and urban communities.

In 1998 a notable effort to support police organizations began with a program called "Adopt-a-Cop". It was initiated by Chaplain Sgt. Ken Rochell of the Michigan State Police. He envisioned it as a ministry to serve as a bridge between local churches and their local law enforcement agencies. Adopt-a-Cop BJJ is a non-profit, donation-based program and is registered as a 501(c)3 organization that allows active duty patrolling police officers to train at Adopt-a-Cop BJJ-affiliated academies. It pays for 100% of the officer's membership until they reach the rank of Blue belt, which is the second-ranked belt in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. On average it takes around 12 to 18 months to obtain.

Over the years, support for local police has grown, but much of it has gone unnoticed. In 2002 the American Kennel Club's Reunite organization, the largest non-profit pet microchip identification and recovery service provider in the United States, began a grant program aimed at helping search and rescue organizations with their training costs. Later AKC Board member Chris Sweetwood led the way to get Reunite involved with an "Adopt-a-Cop" program in Raleigh, NC. In 2013, Reunite launched its own version of "Adopt-a-Cop", which was a program aimed at supporting police departments around the country with grants for up to \$7,500 through their Canine Support and Relief fund. "Adopt-a-Cop" grants are matched (three-to-one) with funds from AKC Clubs, AKC affiliate organizations and the public (\$7,500 from AKC and \$2,500 from clubs) for a total grant of \$10,000. The "Adopt-a-Cop" grants are used by police departments to purchase patrol and detection dogs that are used to apprehend criminals, locate narcotics, explosives and illegal evidence.

In 2022, AKC Reunite announced that it had made \$526,500 in donations to K-9 units throughout the country through its AKC Reunite Adopt a K-9 Cop matching grant program. According to Tom Sharp, CEO for Reunite, "these grants are helping police departments across the nation acquire dogs that are needed to help contribute to the protection and safety of communities." More than 100 "Adopt a K-9 Cop" grants have been awarded since the inception of their program. Grant requests vary. Some are needed to provide a department with a new dog, others to replace a dog that is retired, and some for dogs that



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were injured and can no longer work.

A recent award to the Kent City Police Department (NY) allowed Sargent Alex Vanderwoude to replace a retired dog. The grant resulted in the purchase of a German Shepherd Dog called “Saber”.

At just 14 months of age, Saber has already completed his certifications as a dual-purpose patrol dog. A sample of the police departments receiving grants are listed here:

| State | Police Department(s) |
|----------------|--|
| California | Humboldt County Sheriff's Office |
| Colorado | Loveland Police Department (two grants) |
| Georgia | Jacksonville Police Department |
| Iowa | Decorah Police Department |
| Minnesota | Kanabec Police Department St. Cloud Police Department |
| Mississippi | Hattiesburg Public School District Police Department Jones County Sheriff's Department |
| North Carolina | Buncombe County Sheriff's Office and Currituck County Sheriff's Office |
| North Dakota | Jamestown Police Department |
| Ohio | Jackson Center Police Department |
| Pennsylvania | Lower Moreland Police Department |
| Oklahoma | Locust Grove Police Department McClain County Sheriff's Office Okmulgee County Criminal Justice Authority Roland Police Department Salina Police Department Tulsa Oklahoma Police Department (three grants) |
| South Carolina | Greenville County Sheriff's Office |
| New York | Kent City Police Department |

For more information about “Adopt a K-9 Cop” grants and donations contact: Megan Ault – Grant Administrator, AKC Reunite at 919-816-3980 or the program’s website at <http://www.akcreunite.org/k9/>.

Reunite is not alone in their effort to support police departments. Other organizations have also become involved. The Penn Vet Working Dog Center raises puppies of many breeds from eight weeks of age to the time when they are ready to graduate into careers as working dogs (roughly 14-16 months of age). They live with dedicated foster families who support a well-rounded puppy-raising program and they come to school at the Penn Vet Working Dog Center (PVWDC) Monday through Friday. The pups are all given the same foundation skills in search, odor work, obedience, agility, proprioception and more. As each pup develops, PVWDC staff evaluate each pup’s strongest area and what they enjoy doing the most. This method is used to put them into careers where they can become the most successful. Over 94% of the pups trained at PVWDC complete the program and graduate into working careers. The majority are deployed as dual purpose and single purpose police dogs, Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) dogs and as conservation detection dogs.

Pictured above right is a German Shepherd Dog named “Kermit” who was trained as a dual-purpose working dog at the Penn Vet Working Dog Center and purchased by Police Chief, David Scirrotto, of the Lower Moreland Police Department, Hunting Valley, PA, with the funds made available via the AKC Reunite “Adopt-a-Cop” program. Kermit is the first canine to be used by the Lower Moreland, Police Department. He is currently on duty with his handler, officer Sierra Volker. Early in his career, while

working with Montgomery County detectives on a warrant, Kermit was involved in the apprehension of guns, money and drugs. He uncovered 100 ounces of cocaine, 2 pounds of marijuana, 50 Percocet pills, 3 stolen guns, \$50,000 in stolen jewelry and \$14,000 in cash.

Chief Scirrotto said a trained patrol dog like Kermit gives his department the special advantage they need in solving and deterring crime. The chief stated that the Penn Vet Working Dog Center supports police units by offering monthly work sessions for canines and police officers.

For information about dogs and the training at the Penn Vet Working Dog Center, contact Training Director Annemarie DeAngelo via email at adeang@vet.upenn.edu, or by phone at 215-898-2200 or 215-898-2211.



Kermit is pictured (l-r) with Lower Moreland Police Department David J. Scirrotto, Chief of Police, Handler and Officer Sierra Volker, along with Dr. Carmen Battaglia, AKC Director

Another difference maker at AKC that supports the police includes the AKC Dog Detection Task Force (AKC DDTF). Their mission focuses on developing a domestic breeding program for detection dogs. The AKC DDTF works with police organizations such as the United States Police Canine Association (USPCA), AKC breeders, and vendors to raise awareness levels for dogs needed by law enforcement agencies. More than 60 breeders in 27 states are involved. More are needed. For more information about how to get involved as a breeder or trainer in the AKC Dog Detection Task Force program or where to find articles and videos that have been posted, contact: Melissa Ferrell, Program Manager at Melissa.Ferrell@akc.org or (919) 816-3577.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carmen L. Battaglia holds a Ph.D. and master's degree from Florida State University. He is an author of many articles and several books, an AKC Director, judge and researcher. He is a well-known lecturer and leader in the promotion of breeding better dogs.

Dr. Battaglia is also a popular guest on TV and radio talk shows including several appearances on Animal Planet. His seminars on breeding better dogs, selecting sires and choosing puppies have been well received by breed clubs. Those interested in learning more about his writings and seminars should visit the website <http://www.breedingbetterdogs.com>