



“PROTECT THE PROTECTOR” PROGRAM

K9 Kita ... a Trailblazer in Chippewa County, Wisconsin

VCS Donated a Bulletproof vest to keep her safe.

The Village of Lake Hallie Police Department has expanded the size of its K9 Department to one! Kita, a three-year-old German Shepherd, is the very first canine for any law enforcement agency in Chippewa County. She is trained in Search and Narcotics Enforcement, as well as Tracking, and is the partner of Sgt. Dan Sokup who started the program. “Having a partner that lives with you is a huge life changer. We go to work together, spend our time off together, and go to sleep at the same time. You become very attached and so does the K9,” said Sokup.

Initially, Kita had to go through a lot of training, but Sokup said it wasn’t long before Kita started showing off her skills. Shortly into her career, Kita tracked down a wanted felon who fled from the police into a wooded area and buried himself in the brush. “It was at this time, when I started thinking about the potential of Kita being injured during the tracking of dangerous subjects,” stated Sgt. Sokup. “Being from a small department with a small budget, we couldn’t afford to purchase a vest for the dog.”

Statistics show that starting and maintaining a police canine program can be quite costly. The initial purchase of a dog can range from \$2,500-\$4,000. Training for patrol and narcotics duties can cost up to \$15,000. Then there are the annual expenditures for food, vet care, equipment, and on-going training. When the Lake Hallie Police Department asked for donations for Kita, VCS Gives Back responded quickly by donating a canine bullet-proof vest. “We had just come back from an NSA (National Sheriff’s Association) Show in Washington where I met Deputy Sheriff Erik Estrada,” said VCS’ CEO Guy DiMemmo. “Deputy Estrada was telling me about the ‘Protect the Protectors Program’ where money is raised to provide vests to police and canine personnel whose agencies cannot afford them. The timing was perfect and we knew how we wanted to help Kita.”

As the Lake Hallie canine program continues to develop, Kita’s assistance is being requested more and more. She regularly responds to call outs in Chippewa, Eau Claire and Dunn Counties, or wherever her services are needed. She visits school and Boy Scout programs for educational purposes. Kita has also become a bit of a celebrity in the area and has been the subject of interviews and press releases, according to Sokup. “I feel much safer knowing that Kita is wearing the same ballistic protection as I am,” stated Sgt. Sokup. “Working with her has been the highlight of my career and I look forward to spending many more years with my new partner. I thank VCS for providing the tools to ensure that she can come home safe in the event of a dangerous situation.”

For more information or to make a donation to the ‘Protect the Protector’ program, visit <http://safesurfin.org/protect-the-protectors/>