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Cover photo by Leo & Jenny Photography

The Makings of a Police Dog and Officer Partnership

By Katie Feuerstein



Sometimes the decision to participate in something small can change your life forever. That's exactly what happened to Dave Delahunt, who has been living in Mequon with his wife, Luan, for nearly 30 years. In 2006, Dave decided to attend the Mequon's Citizens' Police Academy, an annual event where citizens take evening classes to learn what the police do, why they do it, and how they do it. One night, the Germantown Police Department sent their K-9 unit to Dave's class to demonstrate the capabilities of a K-9 unit. The demonstration impressed Dave so much that, afterwards, he asked the Sergeant in charge why the Mequon Police Department (MPD) didn't have a K-9 unit for themselves. The answer he got was simple: they just didn't have the money for it.

That night, Dave returned home and enthused about the class to Luan as he usually did, but this time, the conversation went a little differently. Dave proposed the idea of starting a fund for a K-9 unit for Mequon, and Luan agreed without hesitation. Eventually, with the help of friends, they were able to establish Project K-9 Inc., a 501(c)(3) that became the unit's fund. Luckily, despite no monetary support from the city, Project K-9 Inc. was able to pay for the expenses. The dog alone cost \$15,000, and it cost many times that to pay for the squad and the K-9 unit's equipment. Equipment unique to a K-9 unit includes such things as a special car equipped with what's called a "hot dog" system. Often, the officer will leave the car to handle a situation and the dog will remain in the vehicle. If the officer needs to call the dog for any reason, they have a remote control to open the dog's door. The dog is trained to be by the handler's side in an instant, ready to follow the next command. This way, the officer can leave the dog in the car without concern that they might be separated in a more serious situation.

All commands given to police dogs are actually in German! This is because police dogs are born and whelped in a kennel in Germany famous for breeding dogs specifically to be police dogs. From there, the dogs are purchased and imported to Steinig Tal, a kennel in Campbellsport, WI, and one of the two largest training facilities for police dogs in the U.S. Initially, the dog trains without the handler, but for the last month or so, the dog and handler train together. This is a critically important stage of the dog's training, because the K-9 unit's success depends upon the two working not just as a team, but as one. By the end of their training, the dog is also considered a sworn officer.

After the first K-9 unit squad, Officer John Hoell and his partner Vero, retired in 2014, Dave went in front of the Mayor and the Common Council to propose that the city take over the expenses, given the K-9 unit's clear benefit to the public. The Council voted unanimously in favor of his proposition, and the city took over for Project K-9 Inc. and has been responsible for the expenses since then.

MPD K-9 Unit Officers Jake Schiller and Iron; Photo by Worzella Photography

The MPD's K-9 unit is currently comprised of Officers Jake Schiller and Iron. The two are as inseparable as a good K-9 unit should be. When asked what Iron's least favorite thing to do is, Officer Schiller answered that the dog dislikes being left in Steinig Tal whenever the officer and his family go on vacation, because he hates being separated from his best friend. As long as Iron gets to be with Officer Schiller and his family, he's a happy dog, but he especially loves his work. It's what the dogs are bred for, after all, and they're good at it.

Asked what he'd like to say to the public, Officer Schiller replied, "I'd just like to thank people for all their support all the time. We wouldn't be here if it weren't for that."

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