

Protecting police dogs

Organization provides bulletproof vests for LPD K-9s

BY KEVIN LILLY
PHAROS-TRIBUNE

Two four-legged officers with the Logansport Police Department recently received a gift that could save their lives.

The present – a bulletproof vest for the two most recent LPD K-9s – is a result of the efforts by Brenda Bernhardt, an EMT with Cass County EMS. Through her work with the ambulance service, she has seen police K-9s in action. Once she learned Hodo and Viggo fought crime without the protection of a vest, she set out on a mission.

"I wanted to do something for the dogs to be safe," she said. "They are part of the police department and need just as much care and concern as the officers do."

Bernhardt began researching her options. While doing so, she discovered a website at www.vestnpdp.com. Contacting Susie Jean of Vest 'N P.D.P. Inc. in New Mexico got the ball rolling. After eight months on the list of dogs in need, Jean called Bernhardt with the good news: She had the funds to purchase vests for Hodo and Viggo.

WANT TO HELP?

For ways to donate to Vest 'N P.D.P. Inc., a non-profit organization that provides bulletproof and stab-proof vests to police K-9s across the country, go to its website at www.vestnpdp.com.



P-T photo | Steve Summers

NEW VESTS: Logansport police officers Travis Yike, left, and Adam Morrow pose with their K-9s Hodo and Viggo wearing their new bulletproof vests. The gear resulted from a local inquiry to a non-profit organization that specializes in finding ways to protect police dogs.

The vests, which are valued at around \$800 each, protect the K-9s from both bullets and stabbing. They cost the police department nothing.

K-9 handler Travis Yike expressed his appreciation for Bernhardt's efforts. Because of her and the generosity of Vest 'N P.D.P., Yike's dog Hodo and officer Adam Morrow's K-9 Viggo will be less vulnerable while conducting police business, he said.

"Knowing that he is protected now, as a handler, makes me feel a lot more comfortable sending him

"Now he has a vest on so we all get to go home at the end of the night."

— K-9 HANDLER, TRAVIS YIKE

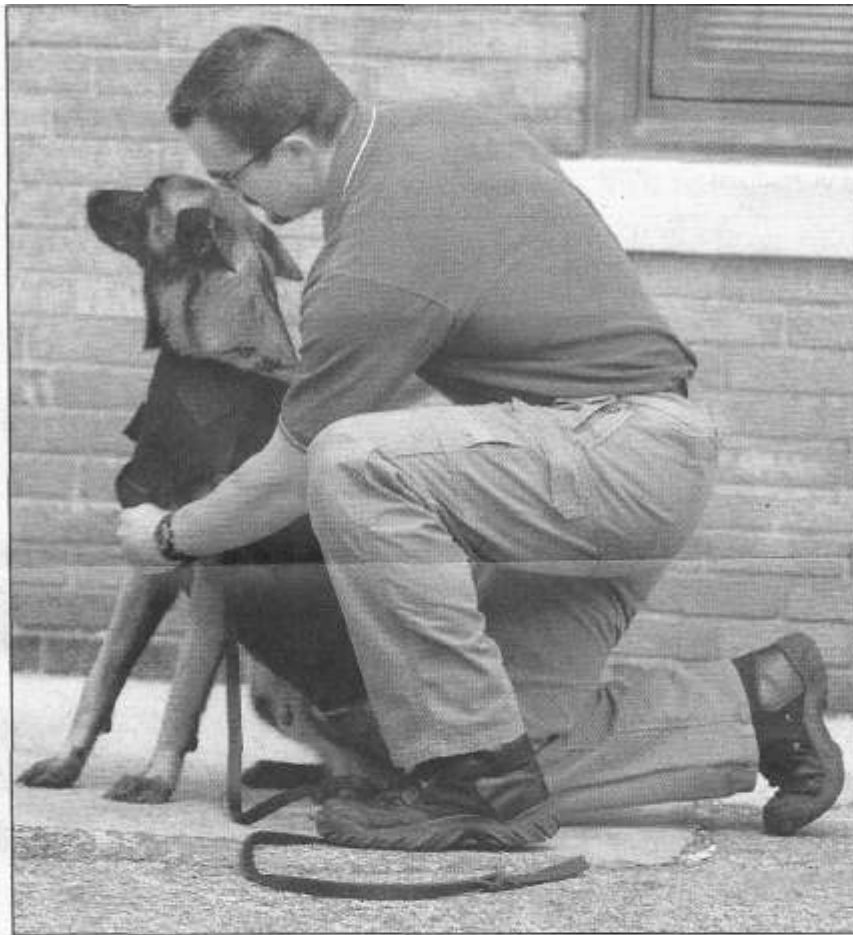
into different situations," Yike said. "Now he has a vest on so we all get to go home at the end of the night."

Yike, who has been a handler for nearly a year, knew the importance of a vest. He had considered vests in the past but cost prevented him from acquiring one.

Yike said police dogs do not per-

ceive danger the same way other officers do. If a suspect is shooting, for example, the K-9 does not consider he could be killed. Without hesitation, the dog would put itself in the line of fire in an attempt to apprehend the person.

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P-T photo | Steve Summers

VESTED: Logansport Police Department K-9 handler Travis Yike puts a new bulletproof vest on his dog Hodo. Yike said now that he has the option, he would use the vest on Hodo before entering a dangerous situation.

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"His whole mindset is to eliminate that threat," Yike said.

The dog's approach to fighting crime makes vests even more important.

"Hopefully we're never put in that situation, but if it did arise the dog is better protected than what it was before," Yike said.

Yike said he will not have Hodo wear the vest at all times. Instead, he will suit him up when going into dangerous situations.

Another aspect of Bernhardt's inspiration came from her husband's accident more than 10 years ago.

Bernhardt is the wife of Logansport

Police Department patrolman Rick Bernhardt. In January 1998, a drunk driver broadsided his squad car. She believes the vest saved him from further critical injuries. He has since fully recovered.

"I saw what a bulletproof vest could do for him," she said.

Jean founded Vest 'N P.D.P. after an episode of "America's Most Wanted" told the story of a police dog that was shot by an armed criminal then proceeded to apprehend the suspect before falling dead at its handler's feet. Since then, her organization has provided protective vests for 548 police dogs in 40 states, according to her website.

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