

Police Dogs Receive Bulletproof Vests from 'Guardian Angel'

by Helena Sung, pawnation.com

Three police dogs in Palo Alto, Calif. are the latest crime-fighting canines to receive a special gift from Susie Jean of Socorro, N.M.: bulletproof and stab-proof kevlar vests.



Norbert von der Groeben, Daily News

"Palo Alto officers said they had coveted the vests for years but couldn't afford them at retail prices of more than \$1,500 each," reports the San Jose Mercury News. But last fall, a resourceful police dispatcher wrote to Jean and her non-profit organization, Vest 'N P.D.P., which raises money to buy bulletproof and stab-proof vests to donate to police dogs across the country.

"It's my passion, and I just really believe in this cause, and I just do what I can to protect as many police dogs as I can," Jean tells Paw Nation. "I have a supplier who sells the vests to me at cost for \$700 each, so I can protect two dogs at the price of one."

After several months of fundraising, Jean -- who's been called "guardian angel to canine cops" -- was able to procure the vests for the dogs. Last week, she traveled to Palo Alto to present German shepherd police dogs Aris, Amigo and Ilan with the protective vests, stitched with their names, reports the San Jose Mercury News. "Two of the dogs jumped up on me like they knew [what I was doing there] and were saying, 'thank you.'" Jean says.

Jean started Vest 'N P.D.P. eight years ago after watching a television program that depicted a police dog being killed in the line of duty. "I had two German shepherds -- Max and Shadow -- and I had lost them to cancer about a year apart," recalls Jean. "A couple of months after Shadow died, my husband and I were watching 'America's Most Wanted,' and they showed video of a K-9 police dog who was going after a guy with a gun, and the criminal shot the dog. What just devastated me is that the dog fell over after the gunshot, but he got back up and knocked the criminal down. Then the officers rushed in and the dog fell over again and he died right there in the officer's arms. Of course, with me losing my dogs, I just started crying."

Jean, then living in Georgia, called her local police department and learned that her town's three police dogs did not have protective vests; they were too expensive. "It just struck me wrong," says Jean. She raised enough money to buy three vests. "The next town over heard about it and asked me to help them. Then I started getting out-of-state requests," recalls Jean. "I moved to New Mexico in 2006 and kept getting more requests. I just couldn't turn down any police departments. And here I'm doing it my eighth year."

From time to time, Jean hears stories about a police dog she has helped, such as the one in Indiana who had been wearing the vest only a month when he was savagely kicked by a hulking suspect. "They took the dog to the vet, and the vet said if [the dog] didn't have that vest on, it would have been fatal or he would have been severely injured, but the dog was just bruised," says Jean.

To date, over 500 police dogs in 39 states have received vests from Jean and Vest 'N P.D.P., but it's not enough. "I get a lot more requests than I get donations, and I can only do so many," says Jean. "I have 65 dogs on my list who need vests now."

Still, she finds a way to stay motivated. "When an officer calls and says, 'You just saved my dog's life; can I tell you my story?' That just keeps me going," says Jean. "I hope that all police dogs will be protected someday."