

Pasadena K-9 Taz receives donated protective vest

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It was Pasadena police dog Taz's lucky day. On Wednesday, Nov. 9, he - together with three K-9s from Harris County Constable Precinct 4 - got a custom-made bulletproof vest from non-profit organization Vest 'N P.D.P. (Police Dog Protection).

Taz is the third of Pasadena's currently seven police dogs whom Vest 'N P.D.P.'s founder, Susie Jean, has provided with a protective vest. All in all, Jean has distributed more than 640 vests to K-9 units in 41 states since 2002.

It all started in Lithia Springs, Ga., when Jean watched an episode of "America's Most Wanted," in which a criminal shot a K-9. The dog fell but got up and brought the criminal down before dying in his handler's arms, Jean said.

Just a few months earlier, she had lost her two German shepherds to cancer, which made the experience even more emotional for her.

"If that couldn't touch your heart after losing yours-," she said.

The next day, she called her local law enforcement agency and asked if their K-9s had protective armor. When she was told there were no funds for that, she raised money for vests for the department's three dogs and added two more when the department got more dogs.

"It just snowballed after that," Jean said. "I started

getting requests in the area and then in my state, and then when I moved to New Mexico, I became nationwide."

Jean orders the custom-fitted vests from Lithia Springs-based company Uniform Sales for America, Inc., which provides them to her for the sales price, \$750 per piece - half of what it normally charges.

The vests weigh from 2 to 4 pounds, depending on the dog, Jean said. Unlike their human counterparts, K-9 dogs don't wear their protective gear all the time, only when they are actually dealing with an armed individual.

Pasadena police spokesman Vance Mitchell said K-9 officers have a close bond to their dogs, who are considered part of their families. The officers don't put the dogs in a dangerous situation if they don't have to.

However, "if it's a choice between sending the dog in the bad situation or the officer, the dog is going to have to go. I hate saying it that way but that's the way it is," Mitchell said.

With a dog wearing a bulletproof vest, an officer "might be a little more comfortable sending him in," he said.

Those who want to donate to Vest 'N P.D.P. can go to www.vestnpdp.com. Pasadena resident Fred Connell donated the money for Taz's vest.



Photo by FPD

Pasadena police dog Taz and K-9 officer Val Tang show Taz's new bulletproof vest.