

Lake County Sheriff's Office Hosts Retirement Ceremony for K9 Dax, Take a moment to read Deputy John Forlenza's Touching Speech -

Dax's first deployment to find a suspect was in North Barrington in the summer of 2015. We were called to the scene of a **aggravated** domestic battery that occurred in the middle of the night and the offender had fled from the resident on foot. Dax picked up the offenders' scent outside the home and began tracking him through the woods behind the residence. A few minutes into the track I heard a branch snap in front of us and I thought for sure, it was the offender. Dax ignored it and kept tracking as a deer ran out in front of us. He tracked across a golf course past some sleeping geese like they weren't even there. He continued his search into another heavily wooded area where he found the offender hiding behind a tree. Dax started to bark aggressively (something he excelled in) and the offender gave up. I was so proud of him! Looking back, I could tell he was proud of himself also.

Dax has stayed the course over the last nine years, but I never anticipated that first find in the woods would be the start of a career that would see him locate hundreds of violent offenders, subjects in mental crisis, lost children and elderly subjects. And most importantly in the process of finding these individuals saving many of their lives and making a positive impact on many others.

Today we celebrate Dax's retirement as a police K9. Thank you to all of you here today and all of Dax's supporters throughout his career who couldn't be here today. Thank you for all the cards, letters, care-packages and well wishes as he worked to recover from his recent injury.

I want you all to know the special role you have played in Dax's career and his rehabilitation.

I'd like to thank Sheriff Idleburg, and his administration for affording us every opportunity to train so that Dax could reach his full potential and have such a successful career. And above all, thank you for giving me the opportunity to be Dax's handler and now owner!

Thanks to the owners of TOPS Kennels, Alex, Paula and Krista Rothacker. Nine years ago, Alex and Paula saw something special in a hard to handle 13-month-old GSD, at the time named Luka. I remember just before I met Luka, two of his trainers Mike and Joe, told me Luka had a hard time paying attention during his obedience training and didn't like to put his nose to the ground to track but he certainly loved to play. Ironically his obedience and tracking would eventually be what he would become best at and loved to do the most. That rowdy pup would later be renamed Dax by a young student in Lake County community. Anna a student at St. Joseph School in Libertyville at the time provided the unique name of Dax during a "naming contest". Dax had his working name and your attention seemed drawn to him from then on. Paula and Alex paired us up knowing I wouldn't dwell on what Dax was, instead they knew I would train him for what he would become. It didn't take long for Dax's exceptional work ethic and his desire to please to lead to great things. And I was truly honored and proud to be a part of everything Dax accomplished.

Grateful is the word that comes to my mind when thinking of what Sheriff Idleburg, Undersheriff Oliver, Chief Richards, Deputy Chiefs Giamberduca, Covelli and Eckensthaler, K9 Lt. Kaiser, Sgts. Kuvales, Amber and Zinkowich and my fellow Deputies have done for Dax. All of you have played a role in his success.

Over Dax's career, we've had the best trainers possible in Alex, Paula, Krista, **Rolando**, Todd, Nick, Derek, Tim, Paul, Dave and Mike. Dax has had excellent veterinary care provided by Dr. Alexis Newman and her staff at Partners and Paws Veterinary Services, and Dr. Christine Jurek

and her staff at TOPS Veterinary Rehabilitation. To them and all the others who helped Dax be his best by providing optimal training and the best health care possible. Thank you.

There is no way to explain what a family like mine meant to contributing to Dax's success. My wife was always there to lovingly care for Dax if I wasn't. She listened to countless hours of me talking about Dax's training and deployments and provided valuable advice, sometimes by saying nothing at all. My children always gave him their love and plenty of daily distractions. Most of all they sacrificed our time together because they realized how important training time was for Dax. I love you all! Thank you for giving Dax the training and work time he needed and the best environment possible to come home to after every shift.

Dax gave everything he had to being a police canine. He loved every aspect of it, especially finding and sometimes biting an offender. Part of what made Dax so successful was his gentle nature. Dax was never a mean dog; he was always relaxed around people he didn't perceive as a threat. Dax liked and was very calm around other animals. Our cat Mittens is by far his favorite. But that calm nature paired with the proper training made him an exceptionally confident and tough dog. Dax always had the ability to adjust his level of aggressiveness to threats he faced during his career. Many offenders simply gave up without a fight because of his formidable warning bark and appearance (he's so good looking).

I have loved being his best friend and handler for the last nine years. That time has gone by so fast. I wish I took more time to enjoy the little things during his career that looking back seem so much bigger now.

So here are some of the seemingly little things about working with Dax that when I reflect on have grown to mean so much more to me.

I'll miss doing demonstrations with Dax, especially for school children. The look on their faces when they watched him and their thoughtful questions about him always made me smile.

I'll miss following Dax on tracks to find people. Especially, like the one when he apprehended an offender who fled on foot into 6-foot-high cattails after he had crashed a stolen truck with a stolen ATM chained to the back of it. Only to find out later from the FBI the offender that Dax apprehended was part of a criminal network from Texas that had used this technique to steal hundreds of ATM's and millions of dollars in the past.

I will miss **training Dax** with Alex and the TOPS crew and **Rolando**. I'll miss taking Dax with Alex, Rolando and Todd across the country to certifications, trials, demonstrations and shows. I'll miss recapping his deployments with them and planning Dax's training to always make him better.

We will miss being around the other handlers and their canines. Dax always took his training to the next level when other great canine teams were around him.

We will miss hanging out with our fellow Tactical Response Team operators during training and being in the vehicles with them when going to call outs.

Dax and I will miss his supporters everywhere. You need to know how much you have meant to us over the years. You have helped make his career remarkable. Recently, I've received more get-well letters, cards and care packages from you for Dax than I can count. Your "get well" letters and cards have touched me and my family. They have made me reflect on Dax's amazing career even more.

Dax has taught me a lot about being a handler. He has been tolerant of my mistakes and my shortcomings along the way. And eventually I got it right and began to read him better during our deployments which helped him to succeed. There are other great canines out there, some of them are here today. But there was no canine that could out-train Dax, and I believe that played a significant role in his success.

There is a verse, from the book of Isaiah Chapter 6. And I heard the voice of the Lord saying: Whom shall I send? And who shall go for us? And I said: Lord, here am I, send me.

I have always thought of that passage prior to every deployment with Dax. I feel God sent Dax here to go for us when he was asked, and his response, by way of his actions was always “send me”.

Thank you, Dax, for all always being there! God bless all of you and God bless **our** Dax.