



The Story of Lake County K9 Dax.

SHERIFFS K9 HERO SERIES

Brought to you by the Illinois Sheriffs' Association



And K9 Dax Was Born -

K9 Dax was a German Shepherd born March 3, 2014, in the Czech Republic. His mother was a Search and Rescue dog, and his father was a well-known police K9. After arriving in the United States, K9 Dax was raised in Idaho until he was about nine months old. **K9 Dax's first name was actually "Little One", but LITTLE did anyone know he was going to grow up to be a big, strong police K9!**



In Idaho "Little One" lived with other German Shepherds, did some basic training, learned some manners, and had a lot of adventures. K9 Dax was exposed to many different environments and situations in Idaho.

In early 2015, K9 Dax traveled by plane from Idaho to Chicago, Illinois where he was purchased to train as a police K9 by TOPS in Dog Training in Grayslake, Illinois.

[<https://www.tops-k9.com/police-k9>]

Police Dog Training -

K9 Dax lived at TOPS for a few months where he learned more obedience and was challenged with some preliminary police work. While learning at TOPS, the Lake County Sheriff's Office held a police K9 naming contest for the new dogs about to be assigned. Out of the thousands of entries, the name Dax was submitted by a 7th Grader from Libertyville, Illinois and chosen by Deputy Forlenza.

On April 20, 2015, and at only thirteen months old, Dax's life changed forever when he was paired up with Deputy John Forlenza of the Lake County Sheriff's Office. K9 Dax had a huge welcome as he met his family and found his forever home. K9 Dax successfully completed his requirements to become a police K9 in June of 2015 and was sworn into the Lake County Sheriff's Office. K9 Dax raised his paw to take the official oath and was given his very own badge.

K9 Dax was certified to find suspects, protection, narcotics, articles, and cadaver. K9 Dax was also highly skilled in tracking, which led to many of his successful deployments to find fleeing felons and people in need of help. K9 Dax spent many, many hours each week training with Deputy Forlenza and his trainers. K9 Dax thrived in his role as a police canine on patrol and as a member of the Lake County Tactical Response Team. **K9 Dax and Deputy Forlenza together located over 400 missing endangered people or fleeing felons.**

Throughout K9 Dax's career, K9 Dax found hundreds of kilos of illegal drugs, millions of dollars seized, dozens of firearms discarded by offenders, and seized dozens of vehicles.



Along with the work on the street, K9 Dax enjoyed teaching his community about police K9 work through public demonstrations at schools, churches and other local events. K9 Dax was also used to teach other law enforcement agencies about how to effectively use police dogs in deployments.



K9 Dax had many opportunities to travel the country, and a lot of those opportunities were with completing his regional/national certifications and competing in trials with the United States Police Canine Association (USPCA).

The USPCA took K9 Dax to –

- Port Huron, MI,
- Foley, AL,
- Le Mars, IA,
- Grand Rapids, MI,
- Valdosta, GA,
- Springfield, IL,
- Des Moines, IA,
- New Hanover County, NC,
- Altoona, IA,
- Ashland, WI,
- Saint Cloud, MN,
- Nokesville, VA,
- Tulsa, OK,
- Macomb, MI,
- Evansville, IN,
- Madison County, AL,
- Algona, IA,
- Houston County, MN,
- Okaloosa County, FL,

- Smyrna, DE, and
- Sterling Heights, MI where he competed against hundreds of K9 teams.

K9 Dax earned numerous top finishes with the USPCA regional and national trials in the areas of tracking, article searches, narcotics, suspect searches, and protection, as well as six regional championships. K9 Dax earned two United States Police Canine Association's Tracking Exceptional Certifications.

Some highlights to K9 Dax's career were being invited to compete on A&E's America's Top Dog in Santa Clarita, CA where K9 Dax had to run police K9 obstacle courses and compete against dogs from all over the country.



K9 Dax was also chosen as Hallmark Channel's American Humane 2019 Hero Dog Law Enforcement winner! K9 Dax and Deputy Forlenza were invited to Hollywood, CA to participate in a weekend long event honoring seven dogs from across the country, all with their own specialty of making a mark in this world. K9 Dax and Deputy Forlenza were honored to represent the Lake County Sheriff's Office on such a national platform, sharing with everyone the importance of police K9 as well as the story of K9 Dax and his successful career.

After Hollywood, K9 Dax flew to New York to be on the Today Show to promote the Hero Dog Awards before the official show aired.



K9 Dax's Home Life -

During K9 Dax's free time, he loved to just be a dog. He enjoyed playing with his ball, going for a run, jumping in the snow, and swimming. He loved his family and the other dogs and cat he lived with.



K9 Dax always had a soft spot for children and other animals. He was always very gentle and kind to them. K9 Dax loved to sleep when off duty, eat his raw chicken wings (for a special treat), visit his veterinarian team, and do his home exercises and stretches while watching football and hockey games in the living room. **K9 Dax was always a loved and cherished member of Deputy Forlenza's family and included in everything they did together.**



K9 Dax was honored to receive awards for -

2016 Illinois House of Representatives – General Assembly Award

2017 ASIS International (Illinois North Shore Chapter) – Law Enforcement Officer of the Year

2017 Chicago Crime Commission – Paws of Distinction Award

2018 K9s of Valor Foundation – K9 of the Year

2019 Lake County Board Special Recognition

2019 The 100 Club of Chicago – Valor Award

May 14, 2019 State of Illinois House of Representatives 101st General Assembly - House Resolution No. 872 offered by Representative Sam Yingling

2019 American Humane Hero Dog – Law Enforcement Winner

2019 Italian American Police Association – Office of the Year

2022 State Senator Craig Wilcox – Certificate of Recognition

2022 Lake County Sheriff's Office –
Commendation Award

2022 Illinois Sheriff's Association – Award
of Merit

2023 Lake County Sheriff's Office – The
Sheriff's Award of Valor

2023 Illinois Law Enforcement – Medal of
Honor

2023 The German Shepherd Dog Club of
America – Hero Dog Award

2024 State of Illinois House of
Representatives 103rd General Assembly -
House Resolution No. 703 offered by
Representative Tom Weber, commending
Deputy John Forlenza and K9 Dax for their
honorable service and dedication to the
Lake County community, the State as a
whole, and the Nation.

2025 Selected to be inducted into the
National Police Dog Foundation K9
Memorial (May 2025 - Washington, D.C.)



[K9 Dax appeared on:](#)

Several local and national news stations.

Hero Dogs (Fox Nation)

American Humane's Hero Dog (Hallmark
Channel – Los Angeles, California)

Home and Family (Hallmark Channel – Los
Angeles, California)

Access Daily (NBC – Los Angeles, California)

Today with Hoda & Jenna (NBC - New York,
New York)

America's Top Dog (A&E Network – Santa
Clarita, California)

Dynamic K9 Duos (ESPN – Valdosta,
Georgia)

K9 Dax... In the Line of Duty -

On March 3, 2024, K9 Dax was injured while apprehending a person who had committed several felonies, who was fleeing. K9 Dax injured his neck and spine, which resulted in temporary paralysis to his hindquarters. K9 Dax was subsequently diagnosed with cervical and thoracolumbar Intervertebral Disc Disease (IVDD) and lumbosacral IVDD exasperated during his apprehension on March 3rd. K9 Dax went through intensive physical therapy following the injury, allowing him to regain the ability to walk and use his hind legs.

K9 Dax's team of veterinarians determined, for his physical wellbeing, he would not be able to return to active duty.



On March 22, 2024, Sheriff John D. Idleburg accepted K9 Dax's official retirement request from Deputy Forlenza and ordered him to be turned over to Deputy John Forlenza, to enjoy his retirement. K9 Dax will undoubtedly miss going to work every day but will enjoy relaxing with Deputy Forlenza and his family.



Upon K9 Dax's retirement, Deputy John Forlenza said,

“There is no way to quantify or properly express what Dax's service has meant to the Lake County Sheriff's Office, the Lake County community, his supporters across the nation, and especially me. But I cannot refrain from stating his service has been exemplary and most importantly he has saved countless lives, including my own. I am proud to have been his handler and best friend for the last nine years. Dax is a true hero and well deserving of the rest and love that wait for him in his retirement.”



K9 Dax passed away on April 12, 2024, in the arms of his best friend, Deputy John Forlenza. He will forever be a hero to the Lake County Sheriff's Office and everyone who loved him.

