

MH Life Podcast

Season 1, Episode 3

Who's a Good Boy? The Retirement of Police K9 Bax

Text Transcription

Trisha Hall : Hello everyone, welcome to the MH Life Podcast. It is hosted by the Maryland Heights Communications Team. My name is Trisha Hall, the Communications Manager, and I'm here today with Officer Terry Mancusi, our public relations officer, and also here with Officer Alex Waldroup, one of our K-9 officers. Thanks for joining us.

Officer Mancusi : Good morning.

Trisha Hall : So we're here today to talk about Bax, who is one of our K-9 officers. He's been working here since July of 2016, so about seven years. So let's go into a little bit of history... Where did Bax come from?

Officer Waldroup : Bax was imported from Germany to Ohio, which is where we went and selected him from.

Trisha Hall : And so when he's a puppy, like when you guys go and check out these dogs, how do they choose the ones that are trained to be canines?

Officer Waldroup : When we go check them out, they're anywhere from a year to two years old. But if you're going way back to the beginning of like actual, here is a litter of puppies, how do we know which ones are going to be police dogs, which ones aren't going to make the cut? You're looking for all sorts of things. The confidence, the environmental soundness of the puppies. Are they skittish of loud noises? Are they skittish of loud noises? The dogs that are the puppies that are very confident are the ones that we start to gravitate towards as a breeder or a trainer. And those are the ones that we start to pour the time and effort into, then transition them into a police work program.

Trisha Hall : And what type of training did Bax go through?

Officer Waldroup : Bax went through six weeks of training with me in Ohio, and we taught him everything from the basic and advanced obedience on and off leash. We taught him how to find evidence articles to recover after a crime's occurred, or someone has lost something valuable. He's learned to track people. He learned to locate people hiding in buildings, hiding in the woods. We've also taught him to do like officer protection. Whereas, you know, if I'm out and someone tries to attack me, he can assist me in taking that person into custody. He's also trained in narcotics.

Officer Mancusi : Backes was your first K-9, correct?

Officer Waldroup : Correct.

Officer Mancusi : What do you think you were originally looking for in a dog?

Officer Waldroup : The qualities I was looking for in a dog was knowing what we do at Maryland Heights and what his purpose was going to be here. It's that we needed an even balance between a dog that was going to be sociable and be capable of going around to places like RankenJordan, to be able to do our safety town, to do our national night out, go to our schools and interact with our community without fear of you know, an accidental bite or over aggression. But on the flip side of that,

we also needed to make sure that he was going to be capable of going out and protecting our community just the same. So there was that even balance of social with protective for all of us. So that's what we were looking at when we went.

Officer Mancusi : What are the resources or support that Maryland Heights Police Department provides you for the care and well-being of your dog or our canines?

Officer Waldroup : Maryland Heights does a good job. They give us an adequate budget to one, go and train to seek a higher level of training than just the basics, whether that be workshops or seminars across the country, whether it be just regular maintenance training or going back to the kennel school that we went to or even us hosting workshops here in Maryland Heights. And on top of that, they support us by footing the bill for the vet visits, the monthly food intake. They buy treats, they buy toys, and they buy the necessary equipment to keep us at a high level, top tier working dog team.

Officer Mancusi : So where does Bax live?

Officer Waldroup : Currently, he lives inside a kennel, but as soon as he retires, he's going to be welcomed into the house and turned more into a couch potato home protector than go to work and protect everybody scenario.

Officer Mancusi : Awesome. Very cool.

Trisha Hall : In what ways are police canines vital to the police department?

Officer Waldroup : I'd say they're vital in several areas. One, if you look and just a perspective of me as his handler, he's vital in the terms of protection for me. He's first and foremost a deterrent for I can be on a traffic stop or I can be in on some type of investigation with somebody that I'm suspecting to have done a violent crime and his barking alone or my canine patch or the markings on the car, I can see firsthand that it's a visual and audible deterrent to people. I've had people get real aggressive towards me and then him start to bark in an aspect to protect me and them immediately back down from their aggression or that level of aggression, just purely by hearing him. And the terms of the rest of the police department, he's vital in the protection of officers, that his sense of ability for hearing, sight, and smell are so far beyond ours that if we're searching, whether it's a dark building or the dark woods, he's picking up on a violence suspect way before we can. So it provides us with a layer of safety that we can't produce ourselves. I'd say he's vital in his abilities, again, with his hearing, his sight, his smell, to speed the process up. If myself, and Officer Mancusi are tasked with searching a warehouse for an individual, that could theoretically take us hours to do, on the other hand, with Bax, I can do that and spend 5 to 10 minutes and be able to clear an entire warehouse like that. From a narcotic standpoint, the police canines are vital in the sense of protecting the community from any illicit narcotics. Someone's committed a crime and fled and thrown a weapon into the woods or thrown a weapon to try to discard that, then I can utilize a police dog and I can find those weapons. So it's removing that and we don't run the risk of a child or somebody else coming across those and causing harm to themselves accidentally or to one of their friends accidentally.

Officer Mancusi : So regarding the narcotics, is Bax trained in specific narcotics?

Officer Waldroup : Yes. For him specifically, he's trained in the detection of marijuana, methamphetamines, heroin and crack cocaine.

Officer Mancusi : So now with him having the detection capabilities of marijuana, so his job has kind of changed now with the legalization of marijuana, correct?

Officer Waldroup : Correct. With the legalization of marijuana, we've been presented with a challenge of how do we work with the police dogs that have been previously trained and certified on marijuana. And now with the legalization causing challenges and issues with producing probable cause to search vehicles, search areas that we once before could utilize them and now we can't.

Trisha Hall : Is it because you can't differentiate during a search – like, I want you to search for meth and not marijuana? So when he hits on a car, he could be hitting on a number of things because that's what he's trained for. But now that marijuana's legal, you don't want to use that as probable cause, because if he's hitting on something, it could be something that now is legal?

Officer Waldroup : Correct. The majority of dogs, if they were still kind of in the middle of their work life, are being transitioned to either other states that still have an illegal marijuana possession or have been transitioned like back strictly into a patrol function where he's only then utilized for tracking, trailing area searches, building searches, and apprehensions versus that side of narcotics. Some of the older dogs that were closer to the retirement age than working age were just gone ahead and retired and sent home with their handlers. And then we've seen state funded grants that are purchasing replacements for those departments that had to retire a young dog early on just because we know the positive impacts of having those drug detection dogs. The legalization of marijuana doesn't have anything to do with his retirement. His retirement is hinging on one his age and then to the amount of deployments that we've had over his career. He's like a professional athlete who's been in the profession for years and years and years and his body has just taken a toll on the arthritis and the the hip mobility and stuff like that. So for him now, because he's had 13, 14 hundred deployments, his body is showing that age, that wear. So for him it's more beneficial to, hey, you've put all that work in. You're also nearing an older age. Let's give you a relaxing retirement where you can actually enjoy being a dog for a little bit, not just work him until he's in pain and he's crippled. We want to give him an enjoyable retired life.

Officer Mancusi : So currently he's not injured, right?

Officer Waldroup : No.

Officer Mancusi : Has he ever been injured in the line of duty?

Officer Waldroup : Several times. We've had a couple deployments where one in particular was a 4 to 5 hour manhunt where he worked that entire time. And we located that suspect. And when I was putting him up in the car, I noticed some blood where he was walking in, and I checked him out and noticed that he had some pretty severe lacerations to his paws, his pads that had I not seen the blood from from his paws, I would never have known. He never whimpered. He never faltered on his work ability, never slowed in his search for that suspect. That was a pretty big one.

Officer Mancusi : Was he able to work through that injury or did he have some downtime to recover from the injury?

Officer Waldroup : We went to our vet, got some medical attention, and he was down for probably about three weeks to a month just to recover, get off his feet, run some meds and heal them up so he can come back, ready to go.

Officer Mancusi : Oh, wow.

Trisha Hall : What makes a good K-9 partner? Because we all have coworkers, right? And he's your coworker, essentially. What makes a good canine partner?

Officer Waldroup : The list of things that make him a good partner from my end of it being his owner: He's not a destructive dog. I don't run the risk if I leave them running in my house. He's not eating my couch cushions. He's not jumping on the table, stealing my table scraps. When he's in the house. He's a clean dog. He's not having his accidents in the house. He's not having accidents in the back of my police car. From a work standpoint, our bond is extremely important. I rely on him to protect me. He relies on me to protect him to an extent. The trust, the level of trust that's there is paramount. So my ability to trust in him and to be reassured that, hey, stuff's getting really hairy over here, but I've got Bax so you can help me up and I can call him from the car, I can deploy with him. It's a level of safety that is really important. With that, if I, if I had a dog that I didn't have the ability to control or I didn't trust that was going to perform appropriately, that would be problematic for everybody.

Officer Mancusi : Do you think that it is automatic for a handler and a canine to develop that close bond, or do you think it comes over time?

Officer Waldroup : Absolutely not. I think it is a direct reflection of the amount of work that you put in for it, the amount of just interaction that you have with him. If I purely just left him in a kennel at home and when I left for work, put him in the back of my car and only got him out when I needed to utilize him for a work related task, our bond is going to be minimal. But a dog that I can interact with throughout the day can interact with at home, I can do all sorts of engagement activities with him, whether it's just playing tug of war or if it's utilizing his nose to search for treats, I can build that bond. And if I put that work in, you see a relationship like what I've got with Bax.

Trisha Hall : Can you describe a workday like a normal workday with Bax?

Officer Waldroup : So for us, we're on the drug unit. We are a self-initiated, proactive unit. So for for us, we'll come to work, whether it's day shift, afternoon shift or night shift. And we patrol the city in a proactive enforcement trying to locate any criminals, any fugitives. We deter crime. We try to locate and seize any stolen vehicles, any narcotics, and do whether there are short term investigations or long term investigations. He rides with me in the car every day. It does not mean that he is utilized on every contact or every call for service that we may we go to. But he's ready and accessible for any type of call.

Officer Mancusi : Can you share any success stories that canine Bax was involved in?

Trisha Hall : Or like a significant call out that you can remember that will go down in his work history?

Officer Waldroup : Yeah, we've had a bunch. I mean, even early on in his career, we had only been on the very first day that we were on patrol. He had a seizure of some methamphetamine within like the first 2 hours of us being on patrol. His biggest like weighted like monetary weighted drug bust was 25 kilos of cocaine for the DEA. We've had numerous, numerous seizures of marijuana for surrounding departments, Highway patrol, DEA. Anywhere from ten to 50 to 70 pounds. We've got money, seizures that probably tally close to \$1.5 million. He's got several big seizures of, like \$250,000 chunks. We assisted a neighboring agency at one point with a search warrant where he alerted to just the wall on the basement, and everybody's looking at me like, "Hey, your dog's broken" and I'm like,

"I trust my dog. There's narcotics behind it. There's something behind it." And he ended up locating and there was close to \$100,000 hidden behind the drywall of drug money. Most recently, we assisted a neighboring agency with a homicide that had just occurred. Two suspects had fled. One suspect was taken into custody almost immediately with responding officers. The second suspect fled into a neighborhood near a school and near a park. We responded and started to do a track. He was able to locate a track that they knew that he had ran in the general direction, but they didn't know where. Between the houses he was able to determine like, Hey, suspect came between these houses. We started tracking through the neighborhood and we located the murder weapon that was hidden behind a shed. We continue that track through the neighborhood and eventually found the suspect hidden inside a detached garage and was able to take him into custody, which I seriously doubt that would have been a successful location of either the murder weapon or the suspect had it not been for the dog.

Trisha Hall : When you say that he's he's located such and such money and, you know, drugs or whatever, what happens to... do we get any of that?

Officer Waldroup : It depends on what level the seizure is made on. I'd say the majority of the money that's seized does return back to I wouldn't say it's the police departments, the community, the schools is where the majority of that money gets returned to.

Trisha Hall : Okay. So the better training equates to more coming back to the community through that.

Officer Waldroup : Absolutely. Yeah.

Trisha Hall : How do you as a K-9 officer, measure success with a dog?

Officer Waldroup : I'd say that's a multifaceted answer where it depends on what we're doing. If we're having a neighborhood night out or we're doing a safety town, I'd measure success and the ability for the community engagement for that specifically. We tailor a lot of that to the kids. So for them to be able to play fetch with him, play tag with him, take pictures with him, that's a success in that type of environment. If it's, you know, we're searching for the homicide suspect that success is we're getting closure and justice for a victim. We're providing safety to a community that murder suspect's not running loose in their neighborhood. And we're getting success on the safety for the officers. The officers aren't having to run blindly into a building to search for that suspect. He's able to locate them and keep us safe, so success in that, as well.

Trisha Hall : So his retirement is planned for this Friday, July 7th, at 1 p.m. What can we expect? I mean, usually we have a cake, we have some treats, we have a speech. Is he going to do a speech for us?

Officer Waldroup : I don't think he nor I will do a speech.

Officer Mancusi : Local Andy's Frozen Custard was generous to donate 200 little cups of ice cream for our community and Bax to enjoy. So we'll have that instead of cake. The community is all welcome and invited to come. We'll be celebrating his retirement in the municipal courtroom at 1 p.m. on July 7th.

Trisha Hall : All right. Well, I hope everybody can join us this Friday. Come on out. Give him some belly rubs. I'm sure we'll see him around with you. You'll probably bring him back to visit us. So what are your hopes for the future?

Officer Waldroup : I'd say to continue the success that the program has brought to the department and the community is to with learning lessons. You know, we're progressive, we're getting better, we're getting better training. We're succeeding and excelling in what we're doing. So my hopes to see the department and the K-9 unit continues that momentum. And, you know, hopefully in years to come that it's not just two dogs from Maryland Heights. Maybe it's three or four or five dogs from Maryland Heights. Maybe it's a dedicated K-9 unit that works under a supervisor and, you know, has a mass 24 hour coverage for the community.

Trisha Hall : Well, Bax, we will miss you at this year's Maryland Heights night out. I know you had a lot of fun in the past, so we'll have to deal with Officer K9 Duke for this time around. He'll have to go visit all the parties by himself. But we'll miss you. Bax, do you have any words that you'd like to add today?

K9 Bax : *Barks*

Trisha Hall : Those are very good sound words of advice. Thanks, Bax. We're going to miss you. Congratulations on your retirement. We will see you on Friday. From the Maryland Heights Communications division, this is Trisha Hall, the Communications Manager. Thank you for listening. Until next time.