



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 19, 2019

FAYETTE HELPING K-9 OFFICERS RETURN TO FORCE

Uniontown, PA – Uniontown City Police Department hopes Fayette County residents and organizations can help restore its beloved K-9 officer program.

Chief Jason Cox said the program was founded long before he became chief in 2008, and continued until the retirement and eventual losses of its last two K-9 officers.

“As an administrator, I look at the program from two perspectives,” Cox said. “It increases our effectiveness as a police department, because those are additional assets to assist on patrols, but it’s also an asset for community relations. Everyone seems to love dogs, so having K-9s gives us the opportunity to do more projects in our community, especially when working with kids.”

Officer Michael Garrow was previously partnered with K-9 Leonidas, who was trained in narcotics and patrol, while Officer Matthew Painter was partnered with K-9 Xavier, who was trained in bomb detection and patrol.

“These K-9 partners provided a valuable and readily available asset to assist our department in investigations, public safety inspections, drug detections, suspect apprehensions and as a viable and agile deterrent to possible criminal activity,” Cox wrote in an open letter to Fayette County businesses. “Their value to the safety of the other Uniontown Police Department officers and the people of Uniontown cannot be overstated.”

K-9 Leonidas retired in 2016 after being diagnosed with Wobbler Disease. In March 2019, Leo received a courtesy transport in a patrol car for his “last ride” to a local veterinarian, where he was euthanized.

K-9 Xavier remained on patrol until he was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease in July 2018. The illness eventually took his life in January of this year.

“Once we lost both K-9s, it became apparent to me that no one wanted to function as a department without these resources,” Cox said. “Unfortunately, we live in a landlocked community where the tax rolls are declining each year, so we just don’t have the funds to get things started on our own again.”

Uniontown police are currently seeking donations to reinstate their K-9 program, with a fundraising goal of at least \$25,000. The money will cover all associated start-up costs, including supplying two dogs, their required training, vehicle adaptations for K-9 usage, equipment and animal care.

While the campaign has already received some support, Cox said officers are trying to spread the message through as many communities as possible, as the program’s reach extends well beyond the city.

“With the dogs, we’ve been able to host Mr. Rogers Day and all kinds of other events; we can go to different boy scout troops and do K-9 demonstrations for merit badges,” Cox said. “They’re also an additional resource to anywhere covered by state police jurisdiction, because we’re able to assist other agencies outside our community that need help with narcotics or bomb threat investigations.”

Cox said the K-9 program is also extremely effective when tracking and locating criminals or missing children.

While a lack of available funding has led to the department’s start-up fundraiser, Cox said maintaining the program beyond its relaunch falls on his shoulders, and he hopes Fayette County residents, businesses and organizations will show their support.

“We as a police department are here to support our community, so any support the community, in turn, takes hold of really comes back as a resource for them as residents. If somebody chooses to help, that’s great,” he said. “We’re not asking for support for something that isn’t going to have a direct impact on services locally. It seems that the ask has so far been very embraced in the community, and myself, along with the mayor and council, are very appreciative of that.”

Donations can be mailed to the Uniontown City Police Department, 45 E. Penn St., Uniontown, PA 15401. Checks can be made payable to the City of Uniontown K-9 fund, and all donations are tax deductible.

For more information, email the chief at cox17@uniontowncitypd.org or call 724-430-2929.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.FayetteCountyPA.org.

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This communication is part of the Fayette County PR Initiative, which is funded through the 2016 Fayette County Local Share Account (LSA) in cooperation with the Fayette County Board of Commissioners, Fayette Chamber of Commerce, The Redevelopment Authority of the County of Fayette, The Redstone Foundation and other partners. This funding has been designated for the continued promotion and marketing of Fayette County, PA.

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