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La Porte's K-9 Unit Making a Name for Itself

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One of La Porte Police Department's newest arrivals already is racking up quite a record of drug busts in the area, and it's all down to her nose.

Lodka, a Belgian Malinois, detected drugs in two separate incidents over a five-hour period Sept. 2, leading to the arrest of five men and the recovery of a stash of drugs and cash.

The first incident was at a residence on the 300 block of South 3rd St., where Travis Tucker and Donald Bianchin of La Porte and Jason Newton of Dayton were found in possession of methamphetamines, crack cocaine, marijuana, drug paraphernalia and almost \$2,000 in cash.

That same day, Lodka detected an illegal indoor marijuana growing lab at the 1400 block of Lemon Lane, leading to the arrest of Pete and James Crews for possession of marijuana. Police confiscated marijuana plants and a 2007 Nissan Titan.

Lodka joined the department in July, the second of two K-9 teams. The police department acquired Teya, a German shepherd, in May.

"There's no question that having the K-9 teams has resulted in more arrests, but even if it's only one more arrest it's worth it," Detective John Krueger said.

In the first incident, the department's Street Crimes unit had been monitoring the residence for several months prior to the bust. When the unit was ready to strike Lodka and her handler were called in.

Krueger said the K-9 team proved vital to the success of the mission, because Lodka was able to alert officers to the areas in the home where drugs had been hidden. Based on the discovery a search warrant was obtained and the K-9 team and Street Crimes unit made the arrests.

Charges of possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver were filed against Tucker and Bianchin, while Newton was charged with possession of a controlled substance.

In the Lemon Lane incident, La Porte officers were investigating a domestic disturbance, when they located marijuana inside the residence. The Street Crimes unit and the K-9 team were called in, and the marijuana lab, complete with 21 mature marijuana plants, was discovered in a detached garage. Pete Crews also faces a charge of family violence assault.

"We're ecstatic with both teams," Krueger said. "This kind of stuff doesn't happen every day."

The police department started the K-9 program in May with the acquisition of Teya through funding from the newly created La Porte Police Memorial Foundation, donations and grants for drug enforcement.

The funding source also pays for Lodka.

The Memorial Foundation is a nonprofit organization created by a group of private citizens to support La Porte Police Department and its officers.

Like Lodka, Teya has notched up drug busts of her own. Just weeks after she arrived, she was involved in a narcotics related seizure that netted \$70,000. And Krueger said both dogs have participated in seizures and arrests virtually every day on the job.

"It's been a worthwhile endeavor," Krueger said. "Both teams have been productive."

The dogs, who live with their handlers, put in a full working week. When on duty, they ride around with their handlers, policing the streets during the busy 7 p.m. to 3 a.m. shift, while on Wednesday's they attend training sessions.

Krueger believes the streets are safer with the presence of the K-9 teams. He said a traffic stop of someone who appears to be driving under the influence of drugs could lead to the detection of drugs when Lodka and Teya are involved. That discovery, Krueger said, could lead to other drug related crimes from transportation and distribution to the manufacture of drugs.

"These dogs cover all the areas," Krueger said.