

Houston Chronicle

La Porte

Police K-9 squad earns top honor in skills event

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Feb. 18, 2010, 10:42PM

Feeding, grooming and exercising a dog might be a typical part of the day for dog owners, but for two La Porte police officers those tasks are an important part of their job.

Being part of a K-9 team requires officers Jesse Arenivas and Jeff Dalton to share their home, their squad car and the day-to-day challenges of their work with their dogs Lodka and Teya, as partners rather than pets. It also means the officers spend a lot of time keeping their four-legged partners in top shape. Workdays include “training, training and more training — training on city time as well as our own time,” says officer Dalton, who works with Teya. Dalton says most people don’t realize how much work it takes to train and care for K-9’s — but that the efforts are worth it. “Lodka challenges me daily,” said officer and handler Jesse Arenivas. “If I’m not on top of my game, then she’s not on top of her game. I have to stay animated and motivated constantly no matter what.” Arenivas says keeping the right mindset is important since it affects his partner’s performance. “You and your K-9 are a team — one can’t succeed without the other,” Arenivas said.

La Porte’s Police Department officially started the K-9 program last April, with the arrival of Teya. Arenivas and Dalton were chosen for the program by the department based on their qualifications and enthusiasm. Dalton works with Teya, a German Shepherd, while Arenivas works with Lodka, a Belgian Malinois. The Malinois is a breed that closely resembles a German Shepherd and is used for police work, guarding and competition obedience.

Competition winners

Both of the city’s K-9 teams participated in a police K-9 certification competition in Corsicana early this year as part of their continuing training. With more than 100 law enforcement agencies from Texas and Louisiana competing, Arenivas and Lodka turned in the top performance and won the first place trophy for narcotics detection. The competition followed two days of training and skills assessment. “They were competing against bigger agencies with more money and time than we have,” said Detective John Krueger. “So it was cool to come in first place.” Arenivas calls the K-9’s ability to detect narcotics “impressive.”

The dogs are also trained to track humans — from human suspects fleeing the scene of a crime on foot, to a lost child or elderly person with Alzheimer’s. “K-9’s are also a huge deterrent,” said Arenivas. “People with the intention of doing the public harm or transporting narcotics are less likely to do so when they know a K-9 is on the prowl.”

Training for police dogs starts early. Continued weekly training and daily exercise keeps the dogs fit and their skills sharp. One day each week is dedicated to training, which includes exposing them to different scenarios in tracking and narcotics. During their days off the dogs get time to rest, exercise and play. They are also part of the family. Dalton says Teya is best friends with his three-year-old son, and will even obey his commands. Arenivas says Lodka loves affection and has an endless amount of energy. “Lodka’s personality is one in a million,” said Arenivas. “She’s an all around happy dog and a joy to be around.”

For more information about the La Porte Police Department’s K-9 program, contact the Department’s Patrol Operations Division at 281-842-3184 or visit the department’s Web site at www.laportetx.gov/police/.