

K-9 program in beginning stages for PC Sheriff's Office

Written by Chris Lee

A K-9 program is in the works for law enforcement agencies in Phillips County. Undersheriff Thom Elliott and Deputy Michael Grant spoke with members of the City Council at their March 2 meeting about plans for the program.

The program isn't set in stone and won't begin until funds are raised. Grant and Elliott said the program will be able to start if \$2,000-\$3,000 can be raised.

The idea came from Deputy Grant. His father has worked with a K-9 in the L.A. County Sheriff's Office, and Grant would like to incorporate a K-9 program in Phillips County.

The dog will be a drug/search dog instead of a bite dog and be available to all law enforcement agencies in Phillips County 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Grant is scheduled to be the primary handler of the dog.

The sheriff's office asked the City of Holyoke to help support maintenance of the dog. They estimate the total maintenance will be around \$1,200 a year and asked the council to contribute \$400 a year. He said this is something they could work into the 2011-19 budgets as the 2010 budget is already completed. Elliott said the Town of Haxtun has already jumped on board to help with the costs.

The plan is to use the dog primarily as a sniff dog, according to Elliott. "We think there is a problem with trafficking of drugs through the county, and we're hoping to decrease the traffic by the use of the dog," Elliott added.

Another use for the dog will be tracking. Elliott mentioned they had three cases where people resisted arrest in 2009 and escaped custody. The dog would've helped prevent that, he added.

A third area where they hope to utilize the dog is drug awareness education in the schools.

Grant said they currently have a trial dog. It is an 8-month-old German Shepherd that belongs to Sheriff Rob Urbach and his wife. If the dog shows promise in training, they will save money by purchasing the dog from the Urbachs instead of looking elsewhere.

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Grant mentioned they had planned to go to Oklahoma, to a place that trained dogs for NYPD, to look for a dog. He mentioned Sheriff Urbach has trained three dogs himself, so for now that will be the plan. Elliott said Urbach has already begun to assist Grant in training the dog.

Grant added they will try to get the dog certified toward the end of April.

Elliott said Yuma P.D. and Washington County Sheriff's Office both saw an increase in arrests after the addition of a K-9 program.

In the grant proposal, a new vehicle would be purchased to use for the K-9 program. Elliott said the Phillips County Commissioners are going to be purchasing a new vehicle for Sheriff Urbach to replace the Dodge Durango he currently uses. If enough money is raised, the goal is to purchase a vehicle specific for the dog that would belong to the Sheriff's office.

They have a cage from Eagle County that will fit into a Chevrolet Yukon. Grant said the cage can be chopped down to fit different types of vehicles if necessary.

The dog could be used for service six to eight years, Grant said. By the time the eighth year arrives, the dog begins to struggle getting in and out of vehicles. If by then the program has been a success, a new dog could be purchased.

City council members voted to write a letter of commitment to help with the costs and will provide no more than \$400 this year.

Elliott said they have sent out three grants for a total of \$15,000 and haven't heard back from any of them yet. He also mentioned if anyone would like to help them out with costs, to contact the sheriff's office.