

SOUTH CHARLOTTE

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Officer enjoys patrolling with dog partners

Allison Futterman

Loyal, devoted and brave, all qualities that any police officer would want in a partner.

Officer Darrell Brown, 41, has two partners that satisfy that description.

Both are dogs.

Brown is a member of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's Canine Unit, a special operations division of the police department. A member of CMPD for 21 years, Brown has been with the canine unit since 1999. He had a longtime interest in joining and applied when an opening became available. There were almost 40 applicants for four spots. Brown was offered the position and has been serving with the unit ever since.

There are 13 dog handlers in the canine unit, although Brown is the only member that has two dogs, each with a different purpose.

Fox is a Belgian Malinois that is an explosive ordinance detection dog. Thor is a German shepherd who is cross-trained, is capable of tracking and apprehending suspects as well as locating articles such as stolen property or weapons. Thor also is used for drug searches.

Each dog knows about 10 commands, although they understand and respond to different languages. Fox receives his commands in Dutch, while Czech is the language Thor responds to.

Brown had to learn both languages to the degree that was necessary to train his dogs. This is just one small part of the training involved to be a canine officer with CMPD.

When he joined the unit, Brown and his fellow handlers participated in an intensive training program that lasted almost four months.

Training is a continual aspect of Brown's job. The Canine Unit trains two days a month and must recertify each year.

In order to keep their certification, handlers and dogs work together to successfully complete a variety of different drills.

Each day, Brown works with his dogs to ensure their training is constantly reinforced. When he is not at the site of a crime incident, Brown is practicing drills with the dogs, as well as canvassing crime hot spots.

When the workday is over, Brown and his partners go home, where the dogs are considered part of the family and are given a lot of attention and love.

Fox and Thor can sense when work is done and they are free to be regular dogs.

"They just know," said Brown. They can tell from "the sights and smells of their environment," that it is time to transition from work to pet mode.

Due to the unique nature of his work, Brown is on call 24/7. His high level of service and skill is recognized by his Sgt. Mike Graue.

"Training one police K9 is a job all to itself. So when you add a second K9 search for a completely different substance you have enough work for two, but (Brown) is able to handle it and do a great job at that," said Graue.

In addition to his responsibilities within the Canine Unit, Brown has also been given two awards by CMPD. In 2006, he received the Life Saving Award for his participation in the use of a defibrillator to save the life of a driver who had a heart attack. That same year, he was awarded the Medal of Merit for saving a mother and child from a car that went into a lake.

Although he has seen and done a lot during his time with CMPD, he finds the Canine Unit a perfect fit for him.

"I have no desire to do anything else. I love it," said Brown.

Brown lives with his family in south Charlotte, near Mint Hill. His wife and children also enjoy the dogs.

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