

POLICE + THE PRESS

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REMEMBERING TARA

K-9 to be commemorated by Ball State University Police Department

The wait is almost over. Once spring arrives, the Ball State University Police Department (UPD) will finally be able to install its memorial commemorating the hard work of a truly beloved member: Tara.

Tara was a Belgian Malinois who served as a patrol and narcotic detection dog for UPD for seven years, until her death on Dec. 5, 2013 when she was hit by a car. She was 10 years old.

Her handler, Cpl. Scott Stafford, worked with Tara on the afternoon shift from 3-11 p.m. for those seven years. Stafford said Tara became part of his family.

"She was a very loving dog," Stafford said. "She could run around and play. She was just a gentle, gentle dog. She loved people to pet her, she loved people to play with her. She was a, I would say, an average, normal dog that you would have in your home."

Tara especially adored Stafford's son, Ethan, and slept by his bedside each night. Stafford said that bond began back when Ethan was a baby. Just after Ethan began sleeping in a crib rather than a bassinet, Tara barked to alert Stafford that his son had rolled over onto his stomach in the middle of the night. Since then, Tara and Ethan were together all the time. According to Stafford, she was a friendly, social dog.

"People would never guess that she was a police dog. Never. And I wanted that; I wanted her to be social. I wanted to be able to bring her in here and let everybody pet her that wanted to pet her and play with her. She was very social, maybe even, some people would say-some handlers would say-she was too social. But I disagree with that. I totally disagree with that."

On Jan. 10, 2014, Tara's funeral was held at the Elm Ridge Funeral Home in Muncie, Ind. She was given a proper policeman's funeral with a 21-gun salute and a color guard.

"Everybody that we worked together [with] and everybody from school came down," said Stafford. "It was a really good way to say bye. It was a policeman funeral."

Tara's memorial can be installed as soon as the ground thaws, and stays thawed for a few days. Tara is remembered for her gentle nature and hard work.

"She never ceased to not amaze me. She always did something, whether it was finding drugs up high, and I was like, 'Wow, how'd she do that?' or jumping over fences-she always jumped over a fence. She could jump over a chainlink fence like that. ... She really just never stopped amazing me."

by Sophie Gordon

TAP FOR GRAPHIC



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