



City's new cruiser, dog curb drug crimes

Independence Police Chief and K-9 Handler, Derrick Vold, holds onto narcotics-trained Certain, the Police Department's newest member, as they pose in front of the department's new cruiser. Both the fully-equipped cruiser and the dog were funded by USDA Rural Development.

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The City of Independence Police Department has seen an increase in their drug-related busts since December 2008, thanks to the newest member of their force – Certain, the Golden Lab. Certain, who is trained in all narcotics, comes to Independence through a Community Facility Grant by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development. The \$40,000 grant also paid for a new, fully-equipped police cruiser that the city needed, as they were operating with only one fully-equipped vehicle. Financing cruisers is nothing new to USDA Rural Development, but purchasing a police dog is something that has never before been done in Wisconsin. “My first thought was, ‘Nah, we can't fund the purchase of a dog,’ but then I thought – ‘Why not?’ It certainly is essential to his police work when they started telling me about the increase in the drugs that they were seeing in their village. So,

we just did it,” said Susan Larson, Area Specialist for the Menomonie Area Office, who handled the city's application. The western Wisconsin city, about halfway between Eau Claire and La Crosse, has 1,500 residents and two large distributing plants that bring through lots and lots of traffic, said Independence Police Chief, and K-9 Handler Derrick Vold. Along with that traffic have come drug trafficking and other crimes. “A lot of semi traffic, which are commonly used to transport large amounts of narcotics,” Vold said. There has been a rise in illegal drugs in the area since 2004 for several reasons and being able to utilize a K-9 in opposition to the criminals transporting them is an asset the city was looking for. With dangerous drugs such as cocaine and heroin routinely passing through town, something had to be done; and it was through a traffic stop of USDA Rural Development's own Susan Larson

that the city was guided to using the agency as a resource of funding for their cruiser and K-9 needs. After, not before, the neighboring town of Eleva's officer let her off with a warning for speeding, Larson mentioned her reason for being in the area. “I told him that I worked for Rural Development and had just been in town recently inspecting their sewer plant. I told him that we also had funds available for other things, such as police equipment, etc., and I left him my card. Well, now I was really late for a meeting in Independence, which was well under way by the time I got there. I told them how I had gotten stopped in Eleva and how I had to take the opportunity to do a little outreach at the same time, which delayed me even further. And then the mayor or one of the other board members said, ‘You have money for police vehicles, too? We need one of those!’” They also mentioned the K-9 need

due to the drug trafficking and Larson assisted with the application process, getting the necessary approval in about a month, Vold guessed.

The process was “smooth – it was awesome. It didn’t seem like it was very long,” he said.

After Certain arrived, he and Vold attended a dog handling class together and now the two are inseparable as Certain, who is two years old, lives at home with the 26-year-old Chief and has become a member of the Vold family, even playing with his son.

But it’s not all fun and games for the pair as Certain has had over 20 drug busts in the last four months, including one worth about \$37,000, counting the Cadillac Escalade they impounded and the \$6,500 in cash that was found in a hidden compartment inside the vehicle.

“Certain gets used three to four times per week. Anything and everything that doesn’t seem right – he’s called in. He’s doing well,” said Vold. “He’s made people actually watch what they’re doing a little more. People in

the community talk to us [police officers] more and he’s excellent in the school with the kids. Really beneficial – it’s not just a big mean guy in the uniform – a lab looks more like their dog they have at home,” and isn’t as intimidating as a German Shepherd

might be, he added.

Up next for the fine pair of officers are several details with the Wisconsin State Patrol and probably more drug busts in Independence as the tempo increases with the nicer weather, Vold



said.

Meanwhile, Certain and his handler continue their duties to *protect and serve*, bringing a sense of accomplishment to themselves and to Larson.

“I think a K-9 unit can be a lot of work and it takes a lot of dedication by the officers involved to that dog. It requires so much more than just a 40-hour week. But what an effective tool for a small rural community in working towards building a safer, drug-free community for all its citizens,” Larson said.



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Certain takes a ride in the back of the new fully-equipped cruiser. His 20-plus drug busts since

December 2008 are only the beginning. He is the only narcotics dog in Trempealeau County.

