

Deputy Ziggy Fights Drugs For Sherman County, Texas

He may be only 4-years-old and weigh in at 111 pounds – but the new deputy in Sherman County, Texas has a nose for justice – literally! Deputy Ziggy, a Dutch Shepherd, recently joined the ranks of the Sherman County Sheriff's Office as its very first K-9 officer.

Ziggy was brought on board through the tenacity and determination of his new handler, Sheriff Joe Powell and it has cost the taxpayers of Sherman County exactly – nothing.

“Zero County money has been spent on this venture,” Powell explained. “The insert or actual cage made for the back of my Tahoe to keep him in and his initial vet bill to have Ziggy checked out was paid for by our District Attorney's office out of their seizure account. I personally purchased Ziggy myself.”

Additional needs for Ziggy, such as a harness, were purchased out of the Sherman County Sheriff's Office's seizure account. The seizure account of the sheriff's office and the district attorney's office is made up of funds seized by law enforcement from those involved in illegal activity – again, it does not come out of the taxpayers' pockets. Ziggy's food will also be purchased by Powell himself.

Powell, who has previous K-9 training, will be Ziggy's handler, a move that was also motivated by protecting the taxpayers.

“A handler for a K-9 has to be given extra money for feeding, training, etc.,” Powell explained. “If I am the handler, as the sheriff, I don't get any 'extra' pay like overtime. There will be no extra time issues, extra pay issues, or anything like that with me having that position.”

Powell will be attending training two days per month in Amarillo with other K-9 officers from there and the surrounding areas.

“The class is free,” Powell said. “We meet there in an abandoned building and train the dogs for 16 hours per month. The Amarillo officers are certified and can then turn around and certify us following the training. Obviously, there will be fuel costs, but I drive every day anyway. There is no cost for the class and no overtime for me because I don't receive overtime.”

Insurance is also not a problem that will be put on the taxpayers.

“The county insurance doesn't cost us any extra for having him on the department,” Powell said. “He is covered automatically under the law enforcement umbrella insurance. If we use a service dog, whether it was paid for by me or the county - the insurance is already there. Not a dime of county money has been, or will be, used for this dog.”

Ziggy is already certified and the training will renew his certifications. He is currently certified as a dual purpose dog and has some experience already under his “collar”.

“He is a working police dog,” Powell said. “He has worked the streets for about two years. Ziggy is certified in finding methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana, and heroin. We have tested him twice since we got him on all four narcotics and he alerted on all of them. All K-9s will miss from

time to time, however, depending on their mood, how they are feeling, what they are doing and what's got their attention."

Previously to coming to Sherman County, Ziggy worked as a K-9 in the Fritch and Skelly Town, Texas communities. His previous handler was moving to another law enforcement agency and was not going to be able to utilize him as a K-9 there. Seeing the value of Ziggy's work, the officer made the decision to sell him to another agency. Powell was told about Ziggy and immediately took steps to bring him to Sherman County. Ziggy and Powell have been spending a lot of time together right off the bat in order to "get to know each other".

"So far he is very obedient trained and he is really big on protecting his handler," Powell said.

Powell said he made the purchase because it was important to the citizens he has been charged with protecting.

"I'm doing what my county needs – that's why they elected me," he said. "Having Ziggy here is important for the citizens of this county. We have already had known cases in this area where cases of candy laced with THC – the main ingredient in marijuana – have been found. I have also been made aware from other law enforcement agencies, that there has been some jelly found that had THC in it."

Sherman County's location is right in the middle of a "drug corridor."

"With Colorado as close as it is to us and them legalizing marijuana, along with Highway 287 running North and South, and Highway 54 – the drug traffic and drug related incidents in this area are on the rise," Powell said. "This is something I will not tolerate either coming in or going out of our county. Our citizens are just too important to us. The sheriff's office is going to do what we are supposed to do to take care of our citizens – what we have to do to get narcotics off of the streets."

And that point was hit home October 21 when the two made their first drug arrest together.

Powell said he had made a traffic stop on Highway 54 on a Colorado vehicle when his K-9 partner "alerted", meaning he detected the presence of drugs. Powell then searched the vehicle and hit "pay dirt".

"We located two bags of marijuana, one pipe, scales, a crusher, and two containers of hash," Powell said. "One person was arrested on felony charges and two others in the same vehicle were cited on related charges and released."

According to Powell, the man arrested on the felony charges was released the next morning on a \$6,500 bond – his case is pending in court. The best part, says Powell, "we got a few more drugs off the street."

Not only is it important to keep the drugs off the streets and protect the citizens, according to Powell, but in today's economic climate, fighting drugs provides the county with an opportunity.

"In many instances, not only can the narcotics be seized from an individual, but their vehicle and cash can be seized as well," Powell said. "Sherman County Sheriff's Office and the District Attorney here have a 70/30 split agreement. If we stop a car out there and an individual has cash, we can seize the cash and the car. We get 70 percent of what is seized and the District Attorney's office gets 30 percent."

Those funds can be utilized for many things that these two law enforcement agencies need

and the taxpayers won't have to assist with. Nearby Texas County, Oklahoma is a perfect example. Texas County Undersheriff Matt Boley said recently there have been more drug arrests and they have gotten more drugs off the street thanks to their K-9.

"For several years now, the taxpayers of Texas County have not had to purchase a vehicle for the sheriff's office, because they have all been purchased out of drug forfeiture funds," Boley said.

Powell and Ziggy are very serious about the job they have been entrusted to do and in order to stay on "top of their game" the duo are continuing their drug fighting educations. Ziggy was left today with trainers at the Worldwide Canine in Spring Branch, Texas.

"They will begin polishing Ziggy up on his narcotics detection abilities," Powell said. "I will return to the school to train with Ziggy soon. I will be there from November 11-21. When we have completed the training, we will both come out with certifications – Ziggy with K-9 Detection Certification and myself with Handler Certification."

Powell said continuing their training is vital.

"I don't want there to be any question as to his or my capabilities in narcotics detection," he said. "Without training like this there is a possibility any drug cases we work could be tossed out of court. The classes and training will give added strength to our cases."

Powell is hopeful that Ziggy will prove to be just as valuable for the citizens of Sherman County as other K-9 officers have proven to be for other agencies. And Ziggy works cheap – a few "Kibbles and Bits", a warm bed and a scratch behind the ear and Deputy Ziggy will be on the case protecting the citizens of Sherman County.

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