

# Gone to the dogs

## WACF has provided continual support for local shelter, K9 Unit

By Julianne Endres

Watertown Area Community Foundation

*Editor's note: In honor of the "Dog Days of Summer," which officially runs July 3 to August 11, we're turning our focus to "man's best friend." We hope you'll 'paws' from your day and enjoy this latest installment of "40 stories for 40 years" as we reflect on the Watertown Area Community Foundation's 40 years of Looking Forward and Giving Back.*

This may sound far-fetched, but investing in the vitality of the Watertown area has meant more than \$100,000 in Foundation grants being awarded to the dogs (and some of their feline friends) over the years.

More than \$70,000 has supported the Glacial Lakes Humane Society. GLHS grants have included support for purchasing

a vehicle to transport animals, a building addition and building enhancements, including a new heating and cooling unit at the shelter, as well as a shade for the outdoor kennels.

Much foundation support has



In 2010, Watertown Area Community Foundation Executive Director Jan DeBerg (left) and Chairman of the Board Dale Christensen presented Donna Rapinchuk, former manager of the Glacial Lakes Humane Society, with an animal-transport vehicle purchased from a WACF grant.

also been awarded to the Watertown Police Department K9 Unit, primarily from the Endres Family Fund, since the K9 program began in 2008. The community has supported the K9 Unit whole-heartedly and was even

involved in naming the first two dogs through a contest.

Regular vigorous dog training, sometimes held in Watertown, is needed to make sure the K9 teams are at optimum performance. It's all making a difference as recent WPD statistics cite more than 50 drug arrests in the last five months were due to the ongoing work of the K9s and their partners alone. Those numbers don't also include the arrests and seizures made with the help of the dogs when deployed to help other officers and departments like the DCI.

"Over the last three or four years, more counties and the highway patrol have obtained dogs," said Capt. Kirk Ellis, head of the WPD K9 unit. "We used to be the only K9 unit around, but now we can focus more on the Watertown area."

Ellis said during the last 12 months there has been a decrease in drug traffic, although not yet a big one.

“We’re definitely seeing a decrease in marijuana consumption as well,” Ellis aid. “By and far, the successes we have had in the battle against drugs is due to the teamwork by our department, the state and feds as well. The dogs have been a big part of it.”

Ellis said another essential part of the team is the community.

“We wouldn’t have this program and we wouldn’t be able to maintain the program without the community support,” he said. “National Night Out was a great example. The dog and the handler were surrounded by praise the whole night. That kind of support is just as important as financial support. I can tell you there are commu-

nities across the state that have had their K9 units go away because they don’t have that support.”

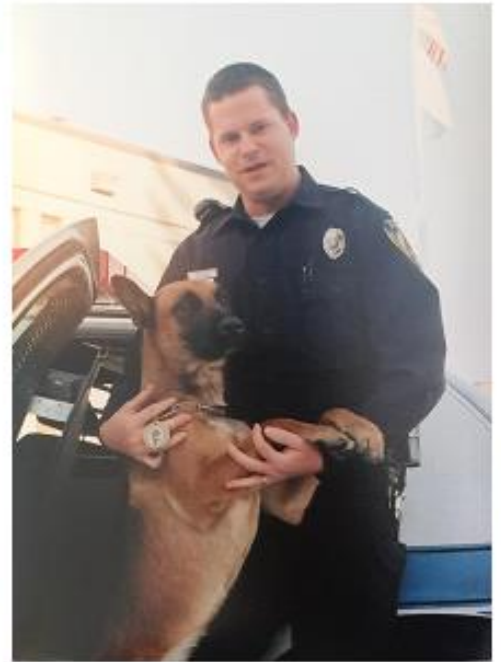
That support is certainly something for dogs to wag their tails about. Still, other foundation grants have been centered around the “furry” members of the family.

Giving Back 365 donors awarded a grant in 2016 to support the newly formed Lake Area Pet Pantry which provided vouchers for procedures to spay or neuter as well as rabies services. Food is also for pet owners who experience temporary financial problems.

The numbers and impact of foundation grants to the dogs is impressive over the past 40 years – even more-so when you consider that’s about 240 in dog years.



**LAKE AREA PET PANTRY** – This photo included board members of the then newly formed Lake Area Pet Pantry which received a grant from Giving Back 365 donors in 2016. The group’s effort assists pet owners with temporary financial need. More information can be found at [www.lakeareapetpantry.org](http://www.lakeareapetpantry.org) or on Facebook. Drop boxes for pet food and kitty litter are at Glacial Lake Clinic, Care Small Animal Clinic, Critter Mart and Ritual Addictions.



**K9 TEAM** – Here, Capt. Kirk Ellis poses in 2010 with TheraDakota (now deceased). Capt. Ellis is head of the WPD K9 unit that continues to make a difference in the battle against drugs in the Watertown area.