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Los Gatos police introduce therapy dogs JJ and Gary

Golden doodles will boost officers' mental health, community engagement



LOS GATOS, CALIFORNIA – MAY 18 : Los Gatos-Monte Sereno Police detective Manny Respicio and police dispatcher LeAnn Linenko walk Gary and J.J., the department's two new community engagement therapy dogs, Wednesday, March 18, 2022, outside headquarters in Los Gatos, Calif. (Karl Mondon/Bay Area News Group)



By **HANNAH KANIK** | hkanik@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group

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The Los Gatos-Monte Sereno Police Department just got two new four-legged additions to the force: therapy dogs JJ and Gary.

The 10-month old golden doodles will be used to support officers' and victims' mental health and to boost community engagement, Police Chief Jamie Field said.

"It even gives a softer approach for what's typically been a militarized view of law enforcement," Field added. "Just last Friday, I came through dispatch and JJ was there, and one of our officers was laying on the ground in full uniform, just hugging on JJ. It was really nice to see."

The department purchased the dogs from Silicon Valley Goldendoodles with a portion of a \$10,000 donation to the Los Gatos-Monte Sereno Police Foundation made during Steve Marucci's "Coach Mooch" fundraiser at Campo di Bocce last September.

The funds covered the cost of the dogs and the three-month training they attended earlier this year in eastern Oregon, where they earned their American Kennel Club STAR and Canine Good Citizen certifications.



LOS GATOS, CALIFORNIA – MAY 18 : Los Gatos-Monte Sereno Police detective Manny Respicio and police dispatcher LeAnn Linenko walk Gary and J.J., the department's two new community engagement therapy dogs, Wednesday, March 18, 2022, outside headquarters in Los Gatos, Calif. (Karl Mondon/Bay Area News Group)

Two companies donated enough funds to earn the naming rights to the two dogs. JJ was named after JJ Albanese construction subcontractors, and Gary was named after Gary Filizetti, president of Devcon Construction.

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JJ is based out of the police dispatch center, and dispatcher LeAnn Linenko acts as his handler. Gary works out of the detective bureau with detective Manny Respicio.

"I think JJ is more outgoing. Gary is more willing to just sit back and hang. JJ is willing to go up to just about anybody," Linenko said.

Linenko earned her master's degree from Azusa Pacific University and did her capstone project on integrating therapy dogs into law enforcement to improve mental health. She said it's important to address the stigma around mental health and law enforcement.

"The anxiety and the trauma from the job that we hear and see on a day-to-day basis isn't what your average person sees," Linenko said.

Field said the dogs have helped break down some of the barriers that police face when interacting with the community. JJ and Gary don't look like "what we're used to in terms of a dog that a police officer may be walking," Field said.

"I think they are going to be great to have out in the community," Linenko said. "I think that dogs create a great ice breaker, that neutral barrier, so people may be able to come up to an officer more willingly, ask questions and open up more."

Respicio, who has worked in the department for five years, said Gary can be used to make members of the public feel more comfortable when interacting with police.

"When we have some victims of violent crimes, we have them interact with the dog and stuff like that," Respicio said. "It helps with interviews with children."

JJ and Gary are the department's first therapy dogs, but they are not the first dogs to be on staff. Kaz, a 5-year-old German Shepherd, works in the department as an apprehension and explosive-detection dog. The department has had drug-sniffing dogs in the past as well.



LOS GATOS, CALIFORNIA – MAY 18 : A new sticker for the Los Gatos-Monte Sereno Police department includes a paw print to celebrate their two new community engagement therapy dogs, Wednesday, March 18, 2022, in Los Gatos, Calif. (Karl Mondon/Bay Area News Group)

The dogs got back from training earlier this month, but the department has already started using them for community outreach. Last week, the dogs went to Venture Christian Church to meet preschoolers.

"They got to learn what it's like to be a police officer ... how the dogs can help," Linenko said. "All the kids got to pet the dogs and see a patrol car."

The dogs will be present at Walk with a Cop and Coffee with a Cop events throughout the summer and early fall, with dates to be announced on the department's social media and website.

The department will also bring them to Los Gatos High School during finals week to help ease students' stress.

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