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Event to Help Local Metro-Link Victim's Foundation

by Rebecca Wicks

Dean Lafayette Brower was one of the victims of the Sept. 12 Metrolink crash in Chatsworth and now local businesses in Ventura are coming together to organize an event to benefit his family. As the Brower family has learned, sometimes help surfaces from unexpected places. Tangrenz, a local salon in Ventura is the main business putting the fundraising event together. "What's notable is no one at the salon ever met Dean Brower. "We were reading the articles about the people affected in this horrible accident and his story moved me," said Jennae Ethier co-owner of Tangrenz. "There was something special about the family."

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A fundraiser will be held at the Ventura Comedy Club to raise money for the fatherless Brower family.

Felix is retiring

by Becca Richman

Officer Jack Ortega and K9 Felix are crime-fighting partners at the Ventura Police Department. At almost ten years old, Felix is getting ready to retire.

"He's earned a good reputation. He's earned his retirement," Ortega said, and remarked that, although Felix still has the ability and energy to work, he has a bothersome elbow and mild arthritis and really deserves to have some good quality, healthy retirement years. Ortega, who is quiet and even-mannered, has worked for the Ventura PD for 15 years and partnered up with Felix 7-plus years ago in the exceptionally disciplined role of K9 handler. The two earned certification through intense schooling, with the officer in courses on codes and ethics and the dog in less theoretical subjects like apprehension (snarling, staring and taking down bad guys) and narcotics. Felix was imported from overseas at just 11 weeks old. His experience, Ortega said, spans the police patrol spectrum, as he has overcome people physically, searched cars for drugs, demonstrated his skills at public service events, and found "with nose to the ground," a number of perpetrators. On one of the latter occasions Felix fetched, unprovoked, County Jail and Probation paperwork dropped by an unknown fleeing suspect, and so effectively reported back to Ortega the man's identifying information.

"He showed us who the guy was before we found him," Ortega recalled. He said, "We ask for a lot out of these dogs — to work, to have courage, and to have the drive to work." He described Felix as able to handle stress well, to intimidate and be aggressive, but as essentially gentle and tolerant. Felix lives at the Ortega household but will not assume the role of "family dog" until retirement, Ortega said. "I'm strict on him. He doesn't eat people food or lay on the couch," and called himself "not master" but "the pack leader, even though it is a very small pack." Ortega takes all re-



Seen Felix is on the spending his work days with Officer Ortega.

sponsibility for Felix's behavior, and while their bond is strong, ultimately he is not tempted to put Felix's safety above that of the public or other officers. During the interview, Felix lolled on the grass outside the police department, a deep brown and black, good-natured ball of muscle, squirming cheerfully with his paws in the air. Afterward, he bounced about Ortega's legs, looking for his toy and perhaps acknowledgement for patiently waiting out all the talking. Ortega said it will be tough for Felix to retire. "He'll have to get used to not working. At 5:30 in the morning, Felix's internal clock says it's time to go to work." And hard for him, too, to give up his favorite place, the back of the "Felix" black and white. Now, though, he might at least try out a covered spot on the living room couch as a close second.

The Ventura Police Department currently has four police dogs, Felix, Carlos, Eros and Ferro. Although Felix came to Ventura as a puppy, and Eros and Ferro were bred here, the majority of the working canines in Ventura County are imported from Germany, said National Police Dog Foundation, and local veterinarian, Ron Dalzell. Not coddled there, he said, they are from a group of German Shepherds raised in a manner to be "champion working dogs." They are usually imported at about a year and half and then serve until they are aged nine or ten.

The National Police Dog Foundation works to introduce skilled and able dogs to agencies. They have a home base in Ventura; board member, Judi Reilly, praises local handlers, police department personnel, and other individuals who have donated time, energy and money toward caring for the dogs. According to Reilly, it takes about \$21,500 to train and maintain each dog — funding which is very difficult to reach on individual donations. With Felix retiring, the Foundation needs to ensure they have funds to support another dog for the Ventura team, and they face similar situations throughout the county.

Using police dogs at high risk situations allays dangers to the public and officers, Dalzell said. "We don't even recognize that we've had so many lives saved just because of the dogs' presence. Their value to the community is just unbelievable." He talked about a man with Alzheimer's who had wandered away from home and was discovered, having fallen and hurt himself at a remote area, by a police dog. He reflected on a number of situations and said, were it not for the dogs, "We would have read different newspaper headlines."

Please visit www.NationalPoliceDogFoundation.org for further information.



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Artist Union Gallery to feature images by Scott Jacobs

Scott Jacobs, a local homeless military vet, was inspired to paint a portrait of Barack Obama on Nov. 4 after voting in his first election.

Scott went to Main St. to paint a powerful, traffic stopping image of Obama.

On Nov. 22 the Artist Union Gallery will feature his images at the close of our 'Election Collections' exhibit.

For more information, contact Dona Wieckowski at 766-1353 or Laurie Pegg-Scott at 650-8252.

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Someday has come....