



## POLICE DEPARTMENT

Office (609) 877-4404  
24-Hours (609) 267-8300

**Robert D. Hess**  
Chief of Police

Fax (609) 877-6396

### Edgewater Park Township Police Department adopts new K-9

The Edgewater Park Township Police Department is proud to announce the newest member of the police force; K-9 Belle. Belle is a 1 ½ year old mixed breed rescue who was adopted by Sgt. Meenan and his family in August 2019 from Out of the Woods Rescue in Medford, NJ. Belle was transported up to the area from Tennessee. K-9 Belle began basic obedience training with her family through Absolute Control Dog Training in Medford, NJ and progressed quickly. Then, while Sgt. Meenan was attending the NJSACOP Command and Leadership Academy in New Castle County, Delaware, he was introduced to K-9 Nikko. K-9 Nikko is the department's facility dog who roams the complex and helps reduce the everyday stress of the job by visiting with the staff. These facility dogs have the ability to calm victims of violent crimes, sexual assaults or the stress of attending a court session.



After hearing K-9 Nikko's story, Sgt. Meenan approached me with this idea. He asked if the Edgewater Park Police Department would be able to use his dog Belle to implement a program like this in our community. It was Sgt. Meenan's goal to bring the K-9 into the school system and spend time with the kids, letting her interact with them to build a strong relationship with the police department. With

everything going on in the country today, you can't turn to a media outlet without hearing a negative narrative about police. Small children are scared of police who at one time were seen as heroes. Sgt. Meenan is confident that K-9 Belle will be a valuable tool in connecting with the younger residents and she will be instrumental in gaining back their trust and respect.

After discussing the idea at length, we both agreed that the idea had significant benefits to help the police department better connect with the community. I had then contacted the Superintendent of the Edgewater Park School District, Dr. Roy Rakszawski.

Dr. Rakszawski immediately showed interest and overwhelming support for the program. He stated that the school district had recently researched an idea to possibly bring in a dog from an outside company for their "Reading with a buddy" program and that K-9 Belle would be perfect fit for the program.

After getting support from Dr. Rakszawski and the school district, Sgt. Meenan approached Belle's trainer with the idea. Belle's trainer, Perry Parks, is the owner of Absolute Control Dog Training and a certified Master Dog Trainer with over 33 years of K-9 law enforcement experience as a handler and

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dog trainer. Perry also co-authored and designed the NJ State Attorney General's K-9 Training Program, which has been adopted by other states and remains the standard protocol for training law enforcement dogs to this day. After hearing Sgt. Meenan's ideas for Belle, Perry immediately took action and started Belle in specialized training to become a Therapy dog in March of 2020. Although Sgt. Meenan had paid for Belle's initial obedience training, Perry, along with other members of his support staff, were generous enough to volunteer countless hours of their time to train Belle in her specialized field at no additional cost. Since Belle was already enrolled in basic obedience classes, her

training progressed very quickly. During her Therapy training, Perry decided to check Belle's scent detection to determine if there was the possibility of any scent work in her future. After putting out a few scent boxes, Belle was quickly able to identify the odor of different narcotics and learned how to alert Sgt. Meenan to her findings. Belle continued to train on narcotics and was able to locate drugs in vehicles, buildings, packages and on people as well.



Once they found out that there was more to Belle's abilities than meets the eye, Perry also decided to begin training Belle on Tracking. Belle went out several days a week into parks, schools, playgrounds and wooded areas to hone in on her tracking skills. Sgt. Meenan would often bring his two daughters along to training who would run tracks and hide in different locations for Belle to find them. Belle would track through busy downtown areas to heavily wooded areas and even across shallow water.

Sgt. Meenan trained with K-9 Belle on his own time for several months and she received her full certification in August 2020 in the areas of therapy, narcotics and tracking. K-9 Belle will be able to serve the community by not only spending time in the

schools with the children and meeting with the residents at public events, but she will also have the ability to track missing persons, children with Autism, elderly residents suffering from Dementia or Alzheimer's or any other wandering disability. K-9 Belle will also have the ability to assist officers with searches for narcotics, whether in a vehicle on the side of a road or the execution of a search warrant for a residence. Belle could also be called to search for evidence that may have been discarded during the commission of a crime. Although Belle's main priority will be to connect with the younger children in town, she does have extensive training in other areas and will be able to utilize those tools, if and when she is called upon.

K-9 Belle can't wait for the schools to reopen and looks forward to meeting with the community real soon.

Sincerely,

*Robert D. Hess*

Robert D. Hess, Chief of Police

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