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Press Release

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[MTA Headquarters](#)

IMMEDIATE

### Thirteen Canines Graduate from MTA Police Department's Explosive Detection Training Course

#### *Officer/Canine Teams Join Elite Counter-Terrorism Unit that Patrols MTA System 24/7*

#### [Photos from the Ceremony Can be Found Here](#)

Thirteen canine and police officer teams graduated from MTA Police Department explosives detection and anti-terrorism training this morning at a ceremony at Grand Central Terminal. The canines are now official officers of the MTA PD and have small police shields affixed to their collars.

The new teams have already experienced active duty. They were pressed into service for additional patrols at Grand Central Terminal and Penn Station following December's bombing inside of a subway passage.

The officers, canine and human, successfully completed an intensive 12-week explosive detection course at the MTA PD's 72-acre training center in Dutchess County, New York, the only state-of-the-art mass transit specific training center in the nation.

The campus houses nine indoor-scenario training areas and multiple outdoor training fields and obstacle courses and areas with cars, buses, platforms and even a decommissioned train, classrooms, twenty-four kennels, a veterinary room with medical kennels, and administrative offices. The outdoor and indoor training grounds provide the MTA Police with an unlimited number of scenarios to teach, drill and test the dogs.

Only about one in thirty canines tested are deemed skilled enough to the join the MTA Police Department's elite unit. The MTA PD has one of the largest canine explosives detection forces in the country, with approximately 50 dogs in service.

Eleven of today's graduating teams will enter into active service with the MTA, investigating suspicious packages and patrolling the trains, stations, tracks and facilities of the Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North Railroad and Staten Island Railway, a 5,000-square-mile territory covering 14 counties in New York and Connecticut.

The MTA PD's canine unit also trains regional law enforcement partners, and two of today's graduating teams will join MTA PD sister agencies: the United States Park Police (canine and officer will patrol the Statue of Liberty) and the City of Peekskill.

"In our post 9/11 world, the MTA PD canine unit is crucial to our counter-terrorism efforts and keeping the public safe," said MTA Chief of Police, Owen Monaghan. "24 hours a day, seven days a week, canine officer teams maintain a watchful presence over the MTA's entire system, patrolling our stations, platforms, trains and parking lots. Last year alone, the unit responded to over 25,000 calls for service and cleared 4,015 unattended packages."

The MTA Police Department's Canine Unit was established in 2002 to protect customers from terrorism and other criminal acts and to help reduce railroad service disruptions by expediting inspections of unattended packages. The dogs support the MTA's security strategy in ways other tools could never do. The structure of a dog's nose gives it a sense of smell that is 3,000 to 5,000 times stronger than the human nose, allowing them to detect explosives and follow a scent trail untraceable to humans, even breaking down specific scents. Canines can do in minutes what can take hours for humans to do when searching for explosives or other evidence in crimes.

In addition to training canines from numerous law enforcement agencies throughout the region, the MTA PD Canine Unit was instrumental in helping the NYPD Transit Bureau and Emergency Service Unit develop their post 9/11 Explosive Detection Program teams.

The canines in the MTA PD's unit, typically German Shepherds or German Shepherd/Belgian Shepherd mixes, are roughly a year and a half old when they go through the rigorous course and can serve in active duty for up to eight or nine years before retiring. Each canine forms a deep, emotional bond with his or her police partner. They not only work together for life, the canine lives with the officer, becoming part of the family.

In keeping with tradition, the canines are named in honor of fallen police officers, firefighters and members of the United States Armed Services. Family members who have a graduating canine named in memory of a loved one attended today's ceremony.

The canines and officers who entered into active duty with the MTA PD are:

- Canine KD, named in honor of FDNY Lieutenant Kevin Donnelly, killed responding to the World Trade Center site on 9/11. KD's partner is MTA PD Sergeant James Chirillo.
- Canine Deuces, named in honor of Poughkeepsie Police Department Detective John Falcone, shot and killed in 2011 when he attempted to subdue a murder suspect. Deuces' partner is MTA PD Sergeant Edward O'Flaherty

- Canine Lemm, named in honor of NYPD Detective and Air National Guard Staff Sergeant Joseph Lemm, killed by a suicide bomber in Afghanistan in 2015. Lemm's partner is MTAP PD Officer Matthew Fontana
- Canine Shaunee, named in honor of United States Coast Guard 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Maritime Enforcement Specialist Shaun Lin, who drowned in a training exercise in Drowning, Virginia in 2010. Shaunee's partner is MTA PD Officer Daniel Gambrell
- Canine Willie, named in honor of NYPD Officer William Rivera, who died in 2004 when he fell from a Brooklyn rooftop in pursuit of a suspect. Willie's partner is MTA PD Officer Giselle Gil
- Canine Joey, named in honor of U.S. Army First Lieutenant Joseph J. Theinert, killed by an IED in Afghanistan in 2010. Joey's partner is MTA PD Officer Christopher Matias.
- Canine Pags, named in honor of MTA PD Lieutenant John Pagnoni, one of the first trainers/supervisors of the canine unit, and who passed away from natural causes in November 2016. Pags' partner is MTA PD Officer Brian McCormack
- Canine Mike, named in honor of U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Michael H. Ollis, killed by a suicide bomber in Afghanistan in 2013. Mike's partner is MTA PD Officer, Frank Musto.
- Canine Mac, named in honor of NYPD Detective Steven D. McDonald, shot and paralyzed by gunfire in 1986 and who passed away in 2017. Mac's partner is MTA PD Officer Alison Schmitt
- Canine Zolo, named in honor of NYPD Sergeant Paul Tuozzolo, killed by gunfire in the Bronx in 2016. Zolo's partner is MTA PD Officer Patrick Schondebare
- Canine Hoss, named in honor of U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Anthony L. Mangano, killed by an IED in Afghanistan in 2008. Hoss' partner is MTA PD Officer Charlie Spahr

#### United States Park Police

- Canine Hammer, named in honor of United States Park Police Sergeant Steven Connell, who passed away in 2017 following a medical emergency. Hammer's partner is United States Park Police Officer Keith McDermott

#### Peekskill Police Department

- Canine Charlie, named in honor of Peekskill Police Department Detective Charles Wassil, who died from World Trade Center related illnesses in 2013. Charlie's partner is Peekskill Police Officer Antony Nappi