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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

MTA Police Department Canine Teams Deemed 'Top Dogs' at United States Police Canine Association Competition

MTAPD Canine Unit Earns First Place in New York State's Toughest Law Enforcement Canine Competition

The MTA Police Department's canines are officially the top dogs in New York State. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority today announced that the MTA Police Department's Canine Unit earned multiple top awards, including first place for overall department teams, at the United States Police Canine Association's Certification (USPCA) competition held in Albany, New York, last month.

Officer Allison Schmitt (canine partner Mac), Officer Allen Kirsch (canine partner Century), and Officer Matthew Fontana (canine partner Lemm), represented the MTA Police Department at the certification competition.

The MTA PD's winning canine/officer teams will be available to answer questions from the media and demonstrate some their expert search, agility and obedience skills at Grand Central's Terminal's Vanderbilt Hall today, July 2 at 2 p.m.

"The MTA PD's canine unit is a crucial component of our counter-terrorism efforts and keeping the public safe," said MTA Chief of Police, Owen Monaghan. "I commend Officer Schmitt, Officer Kirsch and Officer Fontana for earning top honors from the United States Police Canine Association's Certification competition, and I thank them for their hard work and dedication. 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all MTA canine officer teams maintain a watchful presence over the MTA's entire system, patrolling our stations, platforms, trains and parking lots."

While most canine certifications are judged pass/fail, for the USPCA, the nation's oldest and largest police canine organization, multiple judges measure the canine teams to a hundredth of a point. The certification is considered the toughest to achieve for police canine teams. So difficult in fact, that most canine law enforcement agencies bow out of the USPCA's annual certification competition.

In addition to winning the best overall award, Officers Allen Kirsch, Allison Schmitt and Matthew Fontana swept all the competition categories: obedience, agility, evidence search, suspect search, criminal apprehension.

Teams are measured in each category as follows:

Obedience: (entire exercise is completed off the leash):

- Heeling at a series of different speeds and paces.
- Distance control: Standing fifty feet away from his/her canine, the officer commands his/her canine, "sit" and "down," the first time by voice, and the second time by hand.
- Obedience recall: The officer walks his/her canine through a series distance points, and then has the canine sit or stand at each point. The canine then runs through the entire drill on its own and without the officer's vocal commands.
- Walking control: The officer walks his/her dog at a heel position, and the dog is told to sit or stand still, return to heel, and then resume walking without breaking stride.

Agility:

- Hurdles: The officer commands his/her canine to jump hurdles of various heights and sizes, including: a picket fence, a chain link fence, a simulated brick wall, a window, a solid wall and a shrub.
- Catwalks: The officer commands his/her canine to climb a ladder or stairway placed at an angle.
- Broad jump: The officer commands his/her canine to jump graduated heights from six to twelve inches.
- A-Frame: The officer commands his/her canine to climb, and then walk, a triangular a-frame.
- Crawl: Using one voice command, the officer has his/her canine crawl beneath galvanized pipe covered by a chain link fence, and then a four by eight-foot sheet of plywood.

Evidence Search:

Canine/officer teams search for two of the following articles: an expended shotgun shell; a key on a ring; a book of paper matches; a metal gun; a plastic credit card; a screwdriver, or a piece of leather. The canine is given thirty seconds to smell the selected objects, and then must search and retrieve both from a defined area.

Suspect Search:

The canine has four minutes to identify a "suspect" or "suspects" hidden in one of six boxes scattered on open ground. After successfully indicating the suspect has been found, the canine then returns to stand beside his/her officer.

Criminal Apprehension:

Canine/officer teams run through a series of scenarios in which they have to apprehend someone posing as a criminal, including, situations with gunfire, without gunfire and when the officer is in danger.

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.

Officers Allen Kirsch, Allison Schmitt, and Matthew Fontana earned the following honors:

Novice class (for first time competitors):**Overall:**

First place: Officer Matthew Fontana and his canine partner Lemm (named in honor of NYPD Detective Joseph Lemm)

Second Place: Officer Allison Schmitt and her canine partner Mac (named in honor of NYPD Detective Stephen McDonald)

Obedience:

First place: Officer Matthew Fontana and his canine partner Lemm

Second Place: Officer Allison Schmitt and her canine partner Mac

Agility:

First place: Officer Allison Schmitt and her canine partner Mac

Third Place: Officer Matthew Fontana and his canine partner Lemm

Evidence:

Second place: Officer Allison Schmitt and her canine partner Mac

Third Place: Officer Matthew Fontana and his canine partner Lemm

Suspect:

First place: Officer Matthew Fontana and his canine partner Lemm

Third place: Allison Schmitt and her canine partner Mac

Criminal Apprehension:

First place: Allison Schmitt and her canine partner Mac

Second place: Officer Matthew Fontana and his canine partner Lemm

Open class: (experienced)**Overall award:**

Second place: Allen Kirsch and his canine partner Sentry (named in honor of members of the USAF)

Obedience:

First place: Allen Kirsch and his canine partner Sentry

Agility:

First place: Allen Kirsch and his canine partner Sentry

Evidence:

Third place: Allen Kirsch and his canine partner Sentry

Overall top scores (open and novice combined):

Second place: Allen Kirsch and his canine partner Sentry

Fourth place: Officer Matthew Fontana and his canine partner Lemm

Fifth place: Allison Schmitt and her canine partner Mac