



Courtesy Gary Ruef.

Dogs are man's best friend—at home and in the line of duty too.

Enlisting police dogs is a common practice in police departments across the U.S., but bullet-proof canine vests are not part of departments' regular budgets. Police departments often can't find the money to vest their canine officers.

[Vested Interest in K-9s](#) is trying to change that.

In 2009, Sandy Marcal founded the organization, a non-profit dedicated to raising money to provide bullet- and stab-protective vests for law enforcement dogs throughout the U.S.

"I've always been an animal lover," said Marcal. "When I found out that agencies didn't have the opportunities to provide vests due to budget constraints, I started planning events here in Massachusetts and doing fundraising as an independent volunteer...then I decided to incorporate it as a non-profit in order to have opportunities to vest dogs nationwide."

Her goal? To vest every K-9 in the U.S.

The canine vests retail around \$2,800, but because Armor Express has granted Vested Interest in K-9s a government contract price, the organization can buy the vests for \$950.

So far the organization has provided vests for 450 police dogs in 36 states.

Marcal said dedicated volunteers and donors make it possible.

Jodi Roos is one of those volunteers.

"My husband is a Vermont state trooper and he became a canine handler," Roos said. "I had found out that his dog didn't have a vest and wasn't going to be issued a vest."

One year later, Roos has helped raise money for 19 vests by working with Vested Interest in K-9s, including one for her husband's K-9, Quincy.

Many of the K-9 fundraising stories are inspiring.

"Once there was a couple who was celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. Their grown children contacted me to say that they wanted K-9 vests for their present," said Marcal. "So the children presented it to their parents at their anniversary party and the recipient canine and his handler were there too."

That is just one of the many inspirational stories of Vested Interest in K-9s donors. In September, 10-year-old Allison Henry from Holyoke, Mass., asked for donations for her birthday instead of presents. She raised \$1,000 for a local K-9 named Ryker to get a vest.

"If they are willing to standard issue the human officers safety vests I feel that they should also be standard issuing the canine officers bullet-proof vests," said Roos.

But for now, Vested Interest in K-9s has fundraising events scheduled all across the country to raise awareness and money for the cause.