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# Girl's work outfits police K9 with safety vest

## 8-year-old raises money so West Melbourne's 'Boton' can avoid bullet, stab wounds on job

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Ofc. Justin Cantees, left, Rezzo, Ofc. Jason Campbell, Ana Gent, and Lt. Mark Thompson. Ofc. Rob Nolan with Boton at right. / WMPD

Written by Scott Gunnerson FLORIDA TODAY

An 8-year-old girl with a desire to help animals raised more than \$1,000 to put a protective vest on a West Melbourne police dog.

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Ana Gent, a second-grade student at Meadowlane Elementary, was recognized at a ceremony Thursday for her part in outfitting Officer Robert Nolan's dog Boton of the West Melbourne Police Department with a stab-and-bullet-protective vest in the fall.

Gent, who has four rescued dogs and two rescued cats at home, worked with Meadowlane students, West Shore Jr./Sr. High students, Ducks Unlimited Conservation Society, Florida

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To learn more about the the non-profit Vested Interest in K9s, visit: vik9s.org or call 508-824-6978.

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Flatsfishing Association and Palm Bay Fire-Rescue to raise the money for the vest.

"I love animals," said Gent, whose father works for Palm Bay Fire-Rescue. "I know when (police dogs) try to help us, I want them to be safe. I wanted to help them so they wouldn't get hurt."

She also had a car wash and asked neighbors for donations in exchange for stickers she helped design.

"That is a great gesture for her to do that for us," said Commander Steve Wilkinson of the West Melbourne Police Department.

West Melbourne has three police dogs and one already fitted with a vest — Rezzo, that works with Officer Justin Cantees.

"It takes a few minutes to put those things on," Wilkinson said. "If we know we are going into a dangerous situation, they will take the time to put it on the dog."

Gent raised the money during two months in the spring and then contacted Vested Interest in K9s, a non-profit group that provides stab-and-bullet-protective vests for law enforcement dogs.

Sandy Marcal, president of Vested Interest in K9s, started the organization as a way to protect law enforcement dogs in Massachusetts and went nationwide six months ago.

"We've helped a lot of dogs in Massachusetts, and they seem to all have a vest, so we decided it was time to expand to be able to help dogs all over the United States," Marcal said.

The stab-and-bullet-protective vest costs \$1,006 and was tailor-made for Baton by Protective Products Enterprises of Sunrise.

A bullet-protective vest for officers costs about \$500, but the added stab protection is double the price because of the increase in material to stop a puncture.

"It has more layers, so it will take much longer for a knife to go through it," Marcal said.

In 2011, Marcal's group outfitted 64 dogs with vests and 30 dogs are on a waiting list.

Gent's charity efforts were not limited to a dog vest. In the fall, she was the top performer for a school fundraiser and won a lunch with the principal and a new bike, which she donated to the Palm Bay Police Department Shop with a Cop program.

"Since I already had a bicycle, there was no reason to keep it," Gent said. "I gave it to the police officers for Christmas to give to children who needed it."

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