



For Immediate Release

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East Hartford Police Honor Retirement of K-9 Axel and K-9 Officer John Zavalick



From left to right: Sgt. Michael DeMaine, Deputy Chief Mack Hawkins, Chief Scott Sansom, Mayor Marcia A. Leclerc, Officer John Zavalick, K-9 Axel, Deputy Chief Beau Thurnauer, Deputy Chief Tim McConville.

(March 17, 2015) **East Hartford, CT** – Multiple people were on hand, including Mayor Marcia A. Leclerc to honor the nine-year career of police K-9 Axel, and the 17-year career of his handler Officer Zavalick, who also retired as a K-9 officer and will be assigned to another department.

Axel, who officially retired on January 31 and will live with Officer Zavalick, saw a career which was filled with many accolades and several important missions. Axel was on hand to help out during the Hartford Distributors shooting and as a result received the Departmental Bravery Citation in 2010.

Mayor Leclerc offered up a proclamation to Officer Zavalick and Axel, and reminisced about her first memories of Officer Zavalick and his first K-9, Raven.

“John and I go back a long time, I remember meeting John, long before I was involved in politics, and I would see John and his dog Raven at the South End Senior Center,” Mayor Leclerc said. “He was always entertaining and everyone loved John, but I always remembered that whenever there would be a program and he would bring his dog, the dog would always steal the show, let’s be honest.”

In her proclamation, Mayor Leclerc outlined all the accomplishments of the pair, in addition to pointing out that Officer Zavalick and Axel, were one of the most well-trained, well-oiled tandems in the state.

In their nine years together, Officer Zavalick and Axel garnered a 2nd place finish in the 2014 K-9 Olympics, a competition of all the K-9 teams in the state, and finished in the top ten for several other years.

Town Council Chairman Richard Kehoe reiterated that having Axel and the K-9 program was one the things that himself and the Town Council were proud to have in East Hartford.

“I was here when the K-9 unit was first started, and while the town council has always supported the East Hartford Police, the town council loves the K-9 unit, especially,” Kehoe said. “I am very proud to tell people that we’ve been doing this for decades.”

As Zavalick stepped to the podium, he looked around in awe of the amount of people in the room and recalled the fond memories of his seventeen-year career.

“Today I’m retiring my second dog,” Zavalick said. “A lot of people ask me what it takes to be a K-9 handler and I tell them you have to love dogs, you have to deal with getting bit during training, you have to deal with the wet dog smell and the shedding.”

But even though Zavalick has dealt with a lot of different things with his dogs, he said it was all worth it in the end.

“In my opinion, nothing is better and more satisfying than being a dog handler,” Zavalick said. “I miss it already.”



Pictured: K-9 Axel



Pictured: Officer Zavalick and Axel say hello to multiple people who attended the retirement ceremony.

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