

Wilmette police officer, ministry dog provide support for those in need

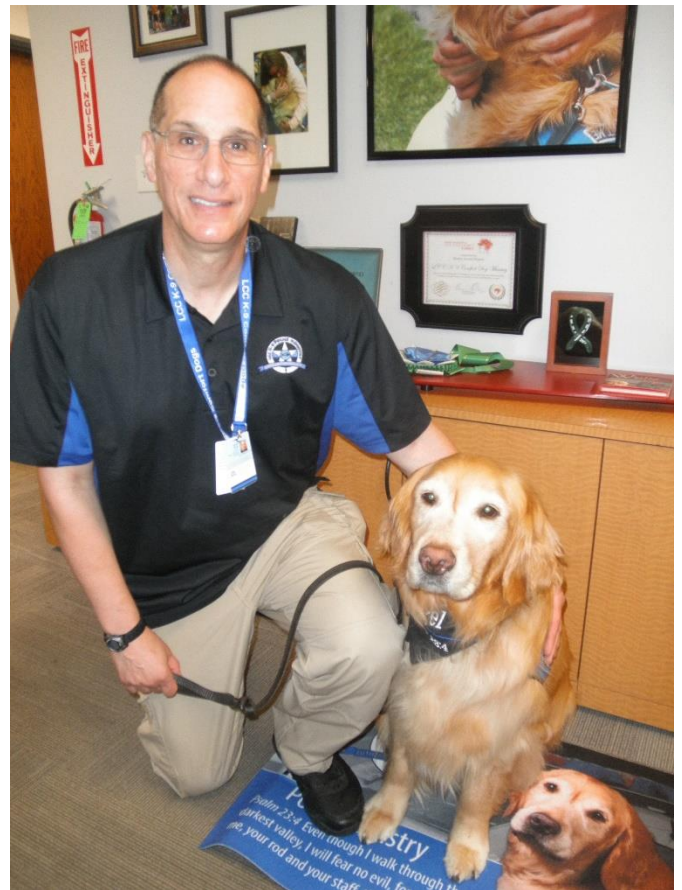
LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Nigel (LCC Staff)

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Wilmette Police Department patrol officer John Falk has joined the growing ranks of roughly 30 current or retired law enforcement officers around the country who have become certified as a Lutheran Church Charities K-9 Police Ministry handler.

Falk, a 17-year veteran of the department, and his ministry dog, 5-year-old Nigel, are now available upon request to provide support for law enforcement and family members both in Wilmette and throughout the area in their time of need by providing comfort following injuries, death or major traumatic incidents.

K-9 visits are also available upon request to provide support at police facilities and assistance with department missions such as Christmas shopping with children, summer camps and public events. Falk and Nigel can also be called upon to comfort crime victims, such as prior to interviews, counseling or courtroom testimony.



Members of the Police Ministry, including Falk, provide their services on a volunteer basis, and represent themselves not as police officers but as members of the Ministry. There is no cost to Wilmette taxpayers.

“This is an opportunity for me to serve and mentor with my fellow police officers,” Falk said. “It is a great outreach, and a great way to share what we call compassion.”

Nigel, like all LCC K-9 Comfort Dogs, is trained to interact with and bring comfort to people of all ages and circumstances, and to provide a calming atmosphere. The dogs

are carefully selected purebred golden retrievers trained by professionals at LCC training facilities.

Falk's first exposure to K-9 Ministries occurred early this year when he, as a drummer with Bagpipes & Drums of the Emerald Society, played at a police officer's funeral. He inquired about it, completed training to be a handler in March, then discussed the ministry with Wilmette Police Chief Kyle Murphy.

"He thought it was a great program" and a worthy addition to the department's officer wellness program," Falk said. "If we were to have a traumatic incident I could bring Nigel in to the department and he could be at the station for any officer who just kind of needs a little down time."

What a Ministry K-9 comfort dog offers to everyone is "the quiet act of listening" and a "bridge" across which compassion can flow. "We don't give advice. We are not professional counselors. We just want to be there," said Falk. "The dog is really our bridge. We want the human connection to be there."

Falk has introduced Nigel at various meetings, departments and events at the station. "The department has been very accepting of the program," he said.

Falk and Nigel have attended an average of two to three events a month since March. In Wilmette, they appeared at a department fundraising event for the Special Olympics at Dunkin' Donuts in West Lake Plaza, and attended events related to children's safety at the Glenview and Wauconda police departments.

On a more somber note, they were on hand following the sudden death from cancer of a Skokie police officer "for officers who were still maybe dealing with that." They also spent time at Mount Sinai Hospital's Level One trauma center, which takes in a lot of shootings. "It was an opportunity for me to say, 'hey, this is Nigel, we are here to provide whatever we can.'" said Falk, who is also a member of the Police Honor Guard, which represents the department in official ceremonies and parades.

LCC's K-9 Ministries never charge those they serve and are donor funded. To learn more about the K-9 Police Ministry, if you are a current or retired law enforcement officer or family member who might benefit from a Police Ministry team visit, or to donate, contact them at 866-455-6466 or visit www.K9Blue.org.