



# Burlington Police Department

## K9 Unit

### History

The history of the Burlington Police canine unit dates back to 1904 when tracking dogs were used to assist in finding the killer of Burlington Police Officer James McGrath. The canine unit for the next several decades was "on again, off again " depending on the political climate of Burlington. In 1964 the canine unit resurfaced after a local resident, Dr. Woodruff, donated bloodhounds for the police department to use over the next several years.

Officers Jim Scott, Jack Rouille and Wayne Liberty were the handlers for several bloodhounds, including a well- known canine by the name of ... "Matt Dillon."

The canine unit as we know it today, resurfaced in 1985 behind the efforts of officers Randal Labarge and William Wolfe and their K-9s "Shep" and "Luger." The program has remained strong since then. Thanks to our canines and their handlers, many lives have been saved, a multitude of criminals have been apprehended and hundreds of pounds of illegal drugs have been taken off the streets. In addition, hundreds of thousands of dollars in suspected drug money has been confiscated. The canine unit also participates in community-oriented activities such as canine demonstrations at schools and public appearances at hospitals and nursing homes.

Being a canine handler requires the handler and the canine be in excellent physical condition. The handler and his/her canine both must graduate from a grueling 16-week patrol school at the Vermont Police Academy. Upon completion, both are certified to do tracking, building searches and protection work. They must graduate from an additional 6-week drug school to be certified in drug detection. The canine team is required to attend monthly in-service training and they must pass a yearly re-certification in both patrol and drug training.

Being a canine handler is dangerous and physically challenging work. Canine teams are deployed to critical incidents regardless of the weather or terrain. Tracking an armed assailant in the middle of the night in frigid weather in deep woods is not an uncommon scenario.

The Burlington Police Canine Unit has won numerous awards and has received public recognition for its success in saving lives, apprehending criminals and taking drugs off the streets.