

‘Build bridges and break biases:’ Spokane police-hosted ‘Faith and Blue’ event meant to build trust

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By Garrett Cabeza garrettc@spokesman.com

[\(509\) 459-5135](tel:(509)459-5135)

A bomb squad robot, armored SUV and even a comfort dog were on display for the public to observe and engage with Saturday as part of a local law enforcement event intended to “build bridges and break biases.”

Richie Plunkett, a Spokane senior police officer in the behavioral health unit, brought his 2-year-old son to the “Faith and Blue” event outside the Public Safety Building on West Mallon Avenue in west-central Spokane.

“We try to get out in the community just to show people that we’re human beings,” Plunkett said.

According to faithandblue.org, the national Faith and Blue weekend in October is meant to reinforce connections between law enforcement professionals and the communities they serve through the reach of houses of worship.

“There is no resource that can match the depth of the faith community in facilitating productive engagement with law enforcement, which is needed now more than ever,” the website says.

The potentially newest connection between Spokane police and the church community is a 3-year-old golden retriever comfort dog named Isaac.

Kevin Piatt, a chaplain with Spokane police, said Isaac would be called on to provide comfort to distraught people at the scene police respond to, or perhaps at a memorial service.

He said the details have not been finalized and the Spokane County Sheriff’s Office may use the dog’s services as well.

“He’s such a laidback dog,” Piatt said.

According to Isaac’s business card, Isaac is a trained Lutheran Church Charities comfort dog at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Spokane Valley.

John Blyckert, one of Isaac's handlers, said Isaac, who has 2,000 hours of training, already visits places like the Union Gospel Mission Crisis Shelter for Women and Children, Ronald McDonald House and Hospice of Spokane to comfort those in need.

In addition to Isaac, John Bujosa, Liberty Lake Police Department ambassador, showcased the department's 2007 Ford Crown Victoria tribute car. The names of more than 100 officers in Washington and Idaho killed in the line of duty since 1980 are displayed on the hood of the car.

The tribute car was donated and Spokane Sunscreen, a business in Spokane Valley, provided the car wraps, including the names of the fallen officers, Bujosa said.

Bujosa said he worked with some of the officers displayed on the hood. The paint design on the hood is a waving American flag depicted on a marble wall, so it appears the names are enshrined on the wall.

"Putting the first name on the car was a very emotional thing for me," said Bujosa, who has since put several names on the car himself.

Meanwhile, Toby Bryer of the Spokane Regional Explosive Disposal Unit operated the new bomb squad robot. Bryer said the robot is used to open doors and clear houses, as well as to inspect packages and devices that could be bombs, among other uses.

Plunkett said the various police vehicles and equipment on display show members of the public how the department's money is spent and how it uses the vehicles and equipment.

Riley Rice and his mother, Lisa Rice, checked out Saturday's event because Riley, 15, wants to be a police officer.

Riley said he wants to serve the community and the country he grew up in, so working at a local agency like the Spokane Police Department or the Spokane County Sheriff's Office is his goal.

"That just seems like a respectable career," he said.