

Welcome to "Lars," our 20-month Belgium Malinois canine officer, who will be handled by Deputy Ryan Dews . We picked up Lars November 13, and will begin a 10-week training program with him and his handler in January. We are so excited to have this newest member of our office! Lars originally came from Czechoslovakia. He was imported into the United States in October, 2015. Lars is a documented and titled Belgium Malinois who started his training around the age of 12 weeks. He comes to our sheriff's office with obedience, searching/tracking, officer protection, and suspect apprehension training.

Lars was tested along with 13 other dogs with similar skills. All of the dogs were either Belgium Malinois or German Shepherds between the age of 14 months and 3 1/2 years.

We looked for a well rounded dog that was both social and inquisitive with a high play drive. Belgium Malinois are generally a healthier dog than German Shepherds; this was also a major factor in the selection process.

Lars tested the best out of 14 dogs tested in a two day process. Each individual test took anywhere between 30 minutes and 2 hours. The testing was rather intense and time consuming but it was well worth the time and effort. We feel that we selected an outstanding dog that will serve Columbia County for years to come.

We drove to California and tested dogs at two different police K9 facilities between Sacramento and Los Angeles, CA. We spent a lot of time on the road getting into hotels late during this process. We owe a huge thanks to the St. Helens Police Department and K9 Officer Jon Eggers. They allowed Officer Eggers to join us and help with the testing process. He has years of experience and has handled three police K9's over the years with St. Helens PD.

As you can imagine the K9 program is in need of some additional funds to make this the best possible program. We need training equipment, vehicle equipment, handler equipment, specific dog care items, specific high quality dog food, specific kennel materials, etc. We also need to raise funds for a ballistic vest and K9 camera system that is actually worn by the K9 while he is out working.

We currently have a non profit 501c3 account set up for donations to the K9 program. We are in the process of starting a social media campaign giving people the ability to "sponsor" Lars as he gets closer and closer to working in our communities. Any monetary donations can be made in person at the sheriff's office or by mail at 901 Port Avenue, St. Helens, OR. Any donations need to be clearly marked as "sheriff's k9 program", receipts for all donations are available.

"Lars will be the only tracking K9 currently working in Columbia County and cities within," said Lt. Dustin Hald. "We have been using Portland PB, Hillsboro PD, Beaverton PD, Washington County Sheriff's Office, Cowlitz

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County Sheriff's Office (WA), and Longview PD (WA). When these agencies were called in to assist it would take anywhere between 1 and 2 hours for a response. Having Lars out on patrol is going to make Columbia County a safer place to live, work, and visit."