



# City of Oshkosh Police Department

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE OSHKOSH POLICE DEPARTMENT

Date: 09/18/2024  
Time: 03:00 PM  
Contact: Officer Kate Mann  
Public Affairs/ Crime Prevention  
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Subject: Oshkosh Police Department Adds a Successor Therapy Dog

(Oshkosh, WI) September 18, 2024: The Oshkosh Police Department has added a successor therapy dog to the Department who follows in the large paw prints of K9 Magic, who tragically passed away in late 2023.

K9 Gema is a professionally trained, two year old female Yellow Labrador who will provide emotional support to both members of our community and Officers. She will be working with our Behavioral Health Officer, Scott Sopata, who since October 2021 has been responding to behavioral health related calls, highly sensitive/emotional calls for service, as well as being used to support employees of the Oshkosh Police Department after Critical Incidents.

She is a very friendly dog, loves treats, and always excited to meet new people. The Oshkosh Police Department continues to be proactive in seeking various strategies to help Officers deescalate situations and bring them to peaceful resolutions. Gema's love, kindness, and support will bring a sense of calm to high stress situations and will be an important asset to both the Department and the City of Oshkosh.

Gema was trained through a program called, Journey Together. Journey Together Service Dog Inc., is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Their mission is to provide highly trained service dogs to people diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Dogs are placed at no charge with qualified Wisconsin residents who are 18 years or older.

This organization has a unique training program for their service dogs. The service dogs reside at the Oshkosh Correctional Institution and inmates apply to the program to provide training in a number of areas and care for the dogs. Community volunteers go to the facility to provide instruction with inmates and take the dogs out of the prison to provide experiences that are not possible in a correctional facility. This partnership significantly decreases the cost of training service dogs, increasing the number of dogs who can be trained and placed in the community. The Oshkosh Police Department feels that partnering with Journey Together and the Oshkosh Correctional Institution helps to support rehabilitation

programs and also support citizens in our community who are diagnosed with PTSD.

Gema has completed extensive training with Journey Together and with Officer Sopata. She has several Certifications: Canine Good Citizen, Advanced Canine Good Citizen, Urban Canine Good Citizen, UKC SPOT and Advanced Trick Dog. Journey Together typically trains their dogs from the time they are 8 weeks old until they are two years old.

Chief Dean Smith stated, "We are very excited to welcome K9 Gema to our team. She will continue the great work that K9 Magic started and will be a blessing to our community. We are very thankful that Journey Together donated K9 Gema to our Behavioral Health Team."

Behavioral Health Officer, Scott Sopata stated: "I was very excited to hear that the City of Oshkosh and our Police Department wanted our facility dog program to continue. Magic opened so many doors of success and I know that Gema will continue that legacy while this program continues to grow. It was an honor to work with Journey Together, their trainers, and volunteers during this successor dog process."

The Oshkosh Police Department feels that Mental Health Wellness is a priority for both its employees and community members. By incorporating a Behavioral Health Officer, a therapy dog, and a Mental Health Crisis Specialist Co-Responder to our team as well as having a Mental Health and Resiliency program for employees we are striving to promote this wellness in our community.

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