



Oakland North

## OPD K-9 unit receives four bulletproof vests



By: [Paige A. Ricks](#) *October 31, 2009 – 1:18 pm* Filed Under: [Crime](#), [Downtown](#), [Front](#), [Neighborhoods](#), [Safety](#)

Oakland Police Officer Albert Liwanag's working partner Baker put on his new bulletproof vest in public yesterday. He did not seem to mind. Liwanag helped out by holding the vest open for him, and Baker, who's a brown and black Belgian Malinois, easily slid each front paw through one of the two armholes. "Police K-9" was written in bold on the side of the black vest.

Last month an FBI dog named Freddy was shot and killed in Michigan in a raid on terror suspects. Earlier this year, a Lathrop, CA police dog named Nico, was shot and killed while helping agents serve a warrant. A San Diego police dog was stabbed in his chest; the dog survived, but was forced to retire. A Sacramento sheriff's dog was killed by a car when the sheriff and his police dog were chasing a suspect on foot and the suspect cut through a busy intersection.

With situations like these being brought to public attention, there has been a growing call nationwide at police departments for bulletproof canine vests. "We're protecting a \$50,000 investment," said Steve Lecouve, the vice president of Western States Police Canine Association, a nonprofit organization that gives safety and training information to K-9 and canine handlers, at a Saturday news conference to display the four new canine vests the Oakland Police Department has received after a fundraising effort. "They cover our back every single day."

Among the recipients of the vests, the first ever for Oakland's canine unit, were two police dogs involved in the search for the gunman who killed four Oakland officers on March 21.

Lecouve said each vest cost \$800, which is more than the cost of some human bulletproof vests. Canine vests can cost as much as \$1,200, he said.

With the help of Pet Food Express, money was fundraised for the canine vests. Pet Food Express founder Michael Levy said all 34 Bay Area stores launched a "K-9 Police Dog Fundraiser" this summer, urging people to buy dog wash tokens with the proceedings going towards purchasing vests.

The initial goal, Levy said: \$50,000—and that seemed like a stretch.

The final result: \$71,000.

The breakdown: \$27,000 from dog-wash tokens; \$27,000 from customers at Pet Food Express who did not purchase the tokens, but wanted to donate; and \$17,000 in donations mailed to the Western States Police Canine Association's P.O. Box. Even Northern California police departments that already had with bulletproof-vested canine units helped raise money for the Bay Area. The San Francisco Police Department has a private fund for canine vests, for example, but helped in the fundraiser.

One hundred Bay Area police dogs, from police departments in Antioch to San Mateo, were able to receive vests.

Of the remaining amount of money left from purchasing the vests, \$10,000 went into an endowment for retired dogs' medical issues. "Dogs are like professional athletes," said Lecouve, whose retired dog has two pins in his hip.