

CANINE CORNER

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Calling Officer Rocket

A not-for-profit training organisation in the US state of Massachusetts has created a programme to train a very special type of assistance dog — a Community Resource Dog — with the aim of supporting local communities one puppy at a time.

Golden Opportunities for Independence (GOFI) breeds and trains Golden Retrievers for this special role; its founder, Pauline Hoegler, is a Certified Professional Dog Trainer with over 30 years experience in dog training and competitive obedience and agility.

With financial support, GOFI gifts the trained Community Resource Dogs to towns in its region. One community, Needham, received its first dog just before the pandemic began in early 2020. Funded by a grant from the District Attorney's office, Officer Rocket works with both the police and school systems and he lives with the high school's mathematics instructor.

The DA funded Officer Rocket as part of an initiative on positive policing, designed to have the police operate in collaborative ways that are more efficient, kinder, gentler and leading to better outcomes.

Officer Rocket has assisted police officers in local callouts that have a mental health component, for example. At exam time, he visits students to help them de-stress.

During the early days of the pandemic, Officer Rocket and the town's Chief of Police appeared in a public service video to explain the decision to close the town's parks and reserves. Rocket has also promoted COVID-19 vaccination through appearances at the town's vaccination clinic and helped to spread the #MaskUp message (*bottom pic*).

At Christmas, Officer Rocket featured in a public service announcement about security of parcels delivered when no one was home (*top pic*). Online shopping has grown dramatically in the region as a result of the pandemic, enticing thieves to patrol quiet neighbourhoods for a haul of new and valuable goods.

Rocket has also promoted a drug take back scheme encouraging people with unused prescription and illicit drugs to hand them in for safe disposal.

Officer Rocket spreads positivity and joy wherever he goes. He's been called the town's Bestest Boy. With an Instagram following of over 3,800, he's also a local celebrity. When a fundraiser included a walk with Rocket as a prize, its value was listed as priceless.

And when the Commonwealth's Governor visited the town, Officer Rocket was there posting on his Instagram page saying it was nice talking pawlitics with you. 🐾

