

Local family's donation comes full circle with graduation of canine named after late Dartmouth animal lover

Dolores Costa can picture the huge smile on her late husband's face. William Costa passed away in January 2016 after a brief illness. The Dartmouth resident and former Marine loved animals; he and his wife of 57 years had 11 dogs over the years.

After his death, Mrs. Costa donated \$1,000 to the Bristol County Sheriff's Office canine program in his memory. "I can tell you he's smiling right now," Mrs. Costa told Sheriff Thomas Hodgson in March 2016.

That smile only grew bigger on Friday morning when Mrs. Costa and her family came to the Sheriff's Office for the canine academy graduation ceremony. There, she shared a gift and some emotional moments with new canine Officer Kenneth Almeida, whose partner, canine Will, is named in honor of Mr. Costa.



Graduates: The three new Bristol County canine officers are, from left, William Dillingham, Kenneth Almeida and Scott Robbins. (Photo courtesy of the Bristol County Sheriff's Office)

"My father used to call (my husband) Willy, so hearing the name Will is special," Mrs. Costa said. "He's looking down on us right now and he's so happy. The whole family is happy."

Friday's ceremony marked the conclusion of the 16-week canine academy for Bristol County's new officers: William Dillingham and canine partner Sharpy, Scott Robbins and partner Jerry, and Almeida and Will. The officers and their canine partners spent the past four months training on everything from physical endurance and agility to tracking, protection and building searches.

Dillingham, Robbins and Almeida received a rousing, standing ovation from friends and family after Sheriff Hodgson presented them with completion certificates. All three started their BCSO careers as corrections officers years ago.

"We are all so incredibly proud of these committed public servants who will put their lives on the line every day to

protect the people,” Sheriff Hodgson said of officers Dillingham, Robbins and Almeida. “They’ve trained extremely hard over the last 16 weeks. We know their canines become another member of the family, and that bond is as important to the family as it is to the officer.”

Dillingham, Robbins and Almeida join Officers Brennan Bulgar, Mike Bettencourt and Joao Santos to form the Bristol County K9 Division. The team is led by Lt. Paul Douglas, who heads the training academy, and Col. Robert J. Sylvia.



K9 Team: Bristol County canine officers are on shift and available to every city and down in Bristol County 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Standing, from left, are Brennan Bulgar, Joao Santos, Lt. Paul Douglas, Sheriff Thomas Hodgson, Col. Robert J. Sylvia and Kenneth Almeida. Front row, from left, are Scott Robbins, Mike Bettencourt and William Dillingham. (Photo courtesy of the Bristol County Sheriff's Office)

“I couldn’t be more proud of both of you and the great work you do and continue to do,” Sheriff Hodgson said to Lt. Douglas and Col. Sylvia. “Without a doubt, the canine unit here at the Bristol County Sheriff’s Office is the best in the state.”

The new officers bring Bristol County's canine team to full strength. Handlers and their partners are on shift and available to every city and town in Bristol County 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Sheriff Hodgson also thanked some generous friends of the K9 Division for their support. He thanked Mrs. Costa, who pledged to make an annual gift on behalf of her family, as well as Michael Panagakos and Dr. David and Jane Askew of Dartmouth Dental. He also thanked police officers from Fall River, Freetown, Dartmouth, Rehoboth, Mansfield and other communities who attended.

Friday's ceremony also marked the conclusion for some of Bristol County's high school interns. Students from local high schools frequently intern with the Sheriff's Office canine team to learn about law enforcement and corrections. Friday, Sheriff Hodgson presented completion certificates to Jamie Dugas, Bradley Raposo and Maria Tino of GNB Voc-Tech and Sierra Riggins of Dartmouth High School. Fellow interns Zachary Duarte (Dartmouth), Kali Sousa (GNB Voc-Tech) and Vita Warencia (GNB Voc-Tech) were unable to attend the ceremony.



Officers: The three new canine officers and their partners who officially graduated from the BCSO canine academy Friday were, from left, Scott Robbins and his partner Jerry, William

Dillingham and partner Sharpy, and Kenneth Almeida and partner Will. (Photo courtesy of the Bristol County Sheriff's Office)