



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Tazewell County's K9 Maverick Named Illinois Sheriffs' Association 2027 K9 Hero

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – A Tazewell County Sheriff's Office K9 who has helped make more than 100 narcotics seizures, and who this year tracked a fleeing hit-and-run suspect to a hole where he was hiding along an East Peoria creek, has been named the Illinois Sheriffs' Association's 2027 K9 Hero.

K9 Maverick, a 4-year-old German Shepherd/Malinois mix, and his handler, Deputy Austin Gillespie, were selected from six teams nominated by sheriff's offices across the state. Starting this holiday season, Maverick will join the ISA K9 Heroes plush collection, with net proceeds going to the Tazewell County Sheriff's Office K9 Unit.



K9 Maverick of the Tazewell County Sheriff's Office, the ISA's 2027 K9 Hero.

On the job

In February, Maverick was called to East Peoria after a driver struck a woman with his vehicle and fled. Several agencies pursued him until he crashed and ran into the woods. Maverick picked up the track at the crash site and followed it to a creek, where he found the man hiding in a deep hole. The suspect was taken into custody.

In June, Maverick assisted the Mackinaw Police Department after another pursuit ended with the suspect's vehicle stuck in a muddy field. Maverick tracked the driver hundreds of yards through the woods, finding clothing he had discarded along the way. As the team closed in, K9 announcements were given and Maverick began barking. The suspect surrendered and was arrested on multiple felony charges.

"Maverick and Deputy Gillespie are exactly the kind of team this program was created to recognize. Every plush we send out this year puts money straight back into the Tazewell County K9 Unit," **said Jim Kaitschuk, ISA Executive Director.**

Deputy Gillespie, an eight-year veteran of the Sheriff's Office, and Maverick handle narcotics detection, article searches, tracking and fugitive apprehension, and regularly assist neighboring agencies. Off duty, Maverick is a regular at National Night Out and school demonstrations, and spends his downtime swimming, hiking with Deputy Gillespie and playing tug-of-war.

The ISA also congratulates this year's other nominees:

- **Fayette County** – K9 Zero and Sgt. Brock Rich
- **Kane County** – K9 Udo and Detective Lionel Arredondo
- **Kendall County** – K9 Snow and Deputy Stewart Blouin
- **McHenry County** – K9 Kylo and Deputy John Wisniewski
- **Washington County** – K9 Luna and Sgt. Brent Klingeman

About ISA K9 Heroes

The ISA launched K9 Heroes in the fall of 2024 to recognize the work county sheriff's K9 teams do in their communities. Each year, the ISA selects a K9 Hero from agency nominations and produces a plush likeness of the dog, which comes with a matching trading card for those who donate. Full net proceeds go to the honoree's county K9 program at the end of the year.

The program began with Lake County Sheriff's Office K9 Dax (End of Watch April 12, 2024) and his handler, Deputy John Forlenza. On Oct. 8, the ISA presented the DuPage County Sheriff's Office with a check from the 2026 campaign honoring K9 Xena and Deputy Aaron Davis. The Xena Heroes connection plush is still available.



From left: DuPage County Sheriff's Office Lt. Klockars, Deputy Aaron Davis and K9 Xena, ISA's Lynn Saputo, Sheriff James Mendrick, Chief Papa and Deputy Chief McCarthy at the Oct. 8 check presentation.

How to support

A \$30 donation includes the 4-by-9-inch K9 Maverick plush, outfitted with a camo tactical vest bearing the ISA logo, a sheriff's collar and a Blue Line Hero dog tag, along with his K9 Heroes trading card. Maverick will be available in the ISA Holiday Store for "pre-sale" after Oct. 31. Just go to the SHOP button on the ISA website to see when the store opens!

Read the full stories of Maverick and past honorees at

www.ilsheriff.org/k9-heroes, and follow

facebook.com/Illinoissheriffsassociation for updates.

DONATE TO THE ISA K9 HEROES SERIES!

When you donate \$30, you'll receive one of our NEW plush K9 Heroes with Trading Card!

Meet the ISA 2027 K9 Hero - Tazewell Co. K9 Maverick, a dual purpose K9 trained in Narcotics odor detection, article searches, and fugitive tracking. Maverick joined the Tazewell Co. K9 Team 3 years ago and was paired with his handler Deputy Austin Gillespie. He is a HERO, and you can learn all about him when you donate and receive your plush and trading card!

These are who gives of themselves, their putting their own life at great risk for the greater good of others.

Don't miss out on this special opportunity!

PRICE: \$30 ea. includes shipping

Your Donation Makes a Difference!

Every time you shop or become a member, you help ISA continue to provide support and training to Sheriff's Offices throughout Illinois. This special Tazewell County K9 Hero Maverick plush is a DONATION ITEM, with a portion of proceeds going to the Tazewell County K9 Unit in honor of K9 Maverick. This ISA K9 plush is fitted with a personalized camo tactical vest, embellished with the ISA logo, sheriff collar and Blue Line Hero dog tag! Dimensions: 4" x 9"

...AND it comes with a K9 Maverick Trading Card!!

SHERIFFS K9 HERO SERIES
Brought to you by the Illinois Sheriff's Association
ilsheriff.org/k9-heroes

Go to our site to read the full story on Maverick!