

DAILY HERALD (Sept 23, 2010)

It's said that every dog has his day, but how many get two days?

Maxx, a German shepherd in the Wauconda K-9 unit and his handler Sgt. John Combs were recognized during Tuesday's Wauconda village board meeting for winning the Canine Olympics in August. They finished first in individual and team contests.

It marked the second time the duo has won the olympics - the first was in 2008.

The Canine Olympics include events meant to test the handler and the dog working together in all areas of police work. Some events are physically challenging while others, such as a 10-element hidden evidence event, are mentally strenuous.

"Everything we do on the job is tested," Combs said.

That includes shooting, driving and obedience. Combs said there may not be any way to prepare for the events aside from job training and experience.

"It's physically demanding for the officer as well as the canine," he said.

The Canine Olympics are facilitated through the TOPS K-9 kennel complex in Grayslake. Trainer Alex Rothacker said TOPS helps train K9 officers and dogs for 80 police departments, and only the top 15 departments compete in the Canine Olympics.

Combs has been working with Maxx for most of the dog's life - six of his seven years. The two are together all day, every day. At work and at home, a strong bond between officer and dog has been nurtured.

"I spend more time with him than with my family and friends and anyone else," Combs said.

The time they put into getting it right has paid off twice now, and countless other times on the job. Mayor Mark Knigge said that in addition to doing work in Wauconda, the team is appreciated in many departments across Lake, Cook and Kane counties.

"We should be very proud as a community to see what is going on with Maxx," Trustee Jean Mayo said. "I have had the opportunity to see him at work, finding drugs and it's really quite amazing."