

years in the Marine Corps. After doing a number of odd jobs for two years, he was invited by a friend, who was a reserve for the Jefferson Police Department, to go on a ride along.

It wasn't long before Jefferson became a reserve himself, and in 1993, Jefferson, ironically became a full-time officer for the Jefferson Police Department. Although the pay was minimal, Jefferson felt like he found his calling.

"I did it for \$7.58 per hour, but I thought it was the greatest thing ever because I was doing the job that I wanted to do," Jefferson said. "I loved the camaraderie and teamwork that you get in law enforcement."

Towards the end of 1994, Jefferson accepted a job with the Newport Police Department, where he served four years before being hired by KPD in 1998, which is where he felt like he found his niche.

Jefferson was assigned to the K9 unit when he transitioned to KPD. Despite not having professional experience, he had developed a passion for dog-training years prior.

Wilson, Jefferson's former mentor, and his wife had a passion for schutzhund — a dog sport that tests a dog's tracking, obedience, and protection skills, and evaluates if a dog has the appropriate traits and characteristics of a good working dog.

Jefferson became a fan of the sport, and soon developed a relationship with a trainer, who began to show him the ropes.

"It was something that I really enjoyed. I found a passion with these working dogs," Jefferson said.

Jefferson spent his first 12 years at KPD with the K9 unit. After taking a break to serve with the traffic team for five years, he returned to the K9 crew in 2016.

Since working with the K9 unit requires almost exclusively graveyard and weekend shifts, Jefferson is extremely grateful to have a wife, Anna, a lieutenant with Marion County Sheriff's Department, that is sensitive to his quirky schedule — the two have been married since 2018.

"She has one of the more dynamic understandings of what we do in our work," Jefferson said.

Becoming a part of a K9 unit involves a beginning course with the dog and officer that lasts for six weeks and features training together, learning to trust one another and making sure the dog is responding to what is

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being asked of them.

"When you're working a dog, you have to learn how to trust what you are seeing the dog telling you, through body language and behaviors," Jefferson said.

After initial training is completed, the K9 and the officer get certified, but will still meet with a group of handlers weekly to further their training.

According to Jefferson, the training for a police K9 is constant. Even during a graveyard shift, Jefferson would do quick 15-minute drills with the dog to help him stay sharp

"The training is nonstop," Jefferson said.

Throughout his tenure with KPD, Jefferson has gotten a front-row seat to the asset that a highly trained K-9 can bring to the police force. Whether it's tracking down a suspect running away from the scene of the crime, or using their heightened sense of smell to find and apprehend a lawbreaker in the dead of night, police dogs played a crucial role in the department's operation.

"When it's dark, that is where the dog's nose is such an asset and tool. It's amazing to watch these dogs work," Jefferson said. "I have a lot of cops say to me, 'I cannot believe your dog took us right to where they were.' It's usually guys that are new, and once they have seen a good dog team work, they are believers."

Jefferson says that the dogs are not only useful for capturing suspects or sniffing out drug paraphernalia, but also comforting victims in their time of need.

"You are able to use the dogs in different ways. They are a hell of a tool for victims. If you have a young kid that is scared and you introduce a dog that he can pet, it's a way to connect with people in need, because most people love dogs," Jefferson said. "Our dogs are so highly trained. They are like a light switch."

Jefferson said the pinnacle of his career was when he and his dog, Buster, were given an assignment with the Salem SWAT team. Despite the extra hours and responsibility, he jumped at the opportunity.



Jefferson gives Buster a hug on their last day in the patrol car.

Submitted photo

"I was just humbled by the fact that they wanted us to take that role, because that role, in the K9 world, is reaching the pinnacle. Everyone recognizes that you are doing it right," Jefferson said.

While Jefferson takes great pride in the three decades of work he did as a police officer, he also recognizes the many difficult aspects of the job he has had to endure over his 30 years as a cop.

"What Keizer PD does really well is protecting citizens from knowing some of the things that go on in this sleepy town. That's our job, to protect people and protect them from feeling scared or threatened. We make people feel safe," Jefferson said. "It's a lot of trauma. You take someone that has worked more

than 20 years in that career field, they are going to feel that trauma pretty regularly, and it's going to be important to take care of those people."

Jefferson said that one of the hardest things he has had to experience as an officer was when he performed CPR on an unconscious child on two separate occasions but was unable to resuscitate them.

"Cops are really good about compartmentalizing trauma. We box it up, that way we can go to the next call where a 70-year old woman had her identity stolen. You have to put on a face and empathize and make them feel that they matter, but what they don't know is that 10 minutes before

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