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LAPD

Bomb Squad K9 unit fights terrorism with cutting-edge techniques, including some that unleash the highly trained dogs for the first time.

Officer II Vanessa Keortge, Club Member, and her police dog, Riddick.

— PAGE 24

Alive! photo by Tom Hawkins



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LAPD

Photos by Tom Hawkins, Club Photographer, and courtesy the LAPD

Policing, Unleashed



LAPD's Bomb Detection K9 Section has added two new cutting-edge capabilities to thwart terrorism.

If you're a terrorist looking to explode a weapon in a public setting, the LAPD's hard working detective dogs are coming for you – in a couple of impressive new ways.

Over the last 18 months, the Department's bomb detection K9 section – already an effective deterrent – has developed two new capabilities to help prevent the kind of terrorism act that devastated Boston a few years ago. The LAPD is thought to be the only municipal force in the country with these capabilities at this time, although the techniques are spreading.

Detection in Motion

The first technique is called person-borne detection. Its promise – to track suspects with explosives while they are in motion. The dog, on leash with a handler, can track odor vapors in the wake of a suspect, and follow that odor as it works its way through a crowd. In this technique, the dog

remains on leash for the safety of the dog, the officer and the public at large.

Tracking suspects while in motion, in the middle of big crowds (rather than sweeping an open area for fixed objects in advance of a big event – is a new and effective tool for the K9 squad.

Person-borne detective dogs can scan up to 200 people a minute sniffing for explosive residues.

Unleashed

The second capability, unleashing the K9 detection dogs from their handler, is used in specific situations to clear areas without the public. By unleashing its K9s, the Department can sweep potential hot areas much more rapidly and safely.

Later in this section, you can see and read about how these new techniques work. ■

The Bomb Detection K9 Section assigned to the new techniques, from left: Officer Ed Dominguez with Duchess; Officer Vanessa Keortge with Riddick; Officer Tom DeLuccia with Nellie; and Sgt. Mitch Lambdin.



Alive! Feature

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LAPD Bomb Detection K9 Section

About the Bomb Detection K9 Section

The Bomb Detection K9 Section is a specialized group of bomb detection canine handlers whose mission is to deter and detect the introduction of explosive devices in transportation systems and the City of Los Angeles.

Its 15 officer/handlers assist the TSA in bomb detection at LAX. In 2012, the Department obtained its first dog outside the jurisdiction of the TSA and began using these new techniques described here. The Department obtained its second and third independent dogs last October, and placed them in service to implement these new techniques. These three dog/handler teams serve anywhere in the City of Los Angeles, and by cooperation anywhere else.

K9s in Force

LAPD's bomb detection dogs are not the only K9s the department employs. Here are the other K9s that keep the City safe (all require specialized training):

- **Patrol dogs** (for crime suspects)
- **Narcotics dogs**
- **Search dogs** (for handguns, knives and nitroglycerin)
- **Cadaver dogs** (for corpses)
- **Missing-person dogs** (bloodhounds)



Riddick carries a video monitoring unit – a camera on top, and a transmitter on the vest.

THE ALIVE! INTERVIEW

A Changing World



The *Alive!* interview, clockwise from left: Sgt. Mitch Lambdin; Club CEO John Hawkins; and Officers Tom DeLuccia, Ed Dominguez and Vanessa Keortge. All three Officers are Club Members.

On Jan. 8, Club CEO John Hawkins and *Alive!* editor John Burnes interviewed Sgt. II Mitch Lambdin, 26 years of City service; Officer III Tom DeLuccia, 17 years (handler of dog Nellie); Officer Ed Dominguez, 20 years (handler of Duchess); and Officer III Vanessa Keortge, 20 years (handler of Riddick). The interview took place in the LAPD Bomb Squad's facility northeast of downtown.

Sgt. Lambdin, let's start with you. Give us a brief overview of these new programs we're focusing on today. We focused on the LAPD bomb detection dogs at LAX several years ago, but these are different.

SGT. MITCH LAMB DIN: Right. We call it our City Canine Cadre. We have numerous dogs assigned through the federal TSA program and under our contract with the Los Angeles World Airports and the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security. That's what you focused on before. When we were called to do a bomb detection sweep elsewhere, we'd have to pull them away from the airport.

We had limited TSA dogs to do the person-borne explosive detection. That's a very long process, say for the Academy Awards – they might be at it for three or four hours for the entire event. It would cause a big drain on the LAX operations and our ability to respond at LAX. So the department decided, let's get some additional dogs that are not funded through the TSA. We will take experienced LAPD handlers from the TSA program and reassign them to this new program. We'll purchase dogs for them and get them additional training so that they can do other things.

There are a lot of limitations when you are in the TSA program because most of the dogs are owned by the TSA. We had other needs for them. For what we needed, it doesn't work that well to have a dog on a six-foot leash attached to a human being near a bomb. It's just not the best way to do it. There's technology out there where we can train the dog to search areas at a distance that's much safer for the officer and much more efficient. So we purchased our own dogs through grants, and this way we can send them to different events. They can spend eight or ten hours at the Academy Awards or other community events.

The world just recently had a terrorist incident in France. We don't have to worry about draining airport resources when we go to protect the French Consulate here in Los Angeles. Or if Jewish locations are being targeted somewhere in the world, we can go and harden related "soft targets" here in LA. By soft target, I mean somewhere that's very easy for the public to gain access to and to be around. So we can get out there quickly, and it doesn't disrupt all our other operations. LAX is the biggest target on the West Coast. We can't just pull everybody from the airport and leave the Airport Police there without our assistance. This way we can pull these resources without any difficulty.

There's a financial aspect, too. Every time we would deploy a TSA dog outside the airport, the LAPD had to fund that amount of time back to the airport. So there was a financial reason for this, too.

After the recent incident in Paris, did LAPD dogs help secure the French Consulate here in LA?

OFCR. TOM DELUCCIA: Yes. Myself and Officer Keortge went out yesterday.

With Nellie and Riddick.

OFCR. TOM: Nellie and Riddick.

SGT. MITCH: They were there checking vehicles in the area that were parked as a deterrent. If someone were to try to leave something behind, our officers were there to make sure it was clear.

When was this new unit formed?

SGT. MITCH: We started with just Riddick in 2012. With funding and personnel issues, it took us a while before we got up to our present size.

So this is new for all intents and purposes.

SGT. MITCH: This is brand new. They just graduated from their person-borne explosive detective dog training at the end of November.

OFCR. ED DOMINGUEZ: We got our person-borne detection dogs last October, and we started training with them for ten weeks.

Does your unit have a special name?

OFCR. TOM: No, we are part of the Bomb Detection Canine Unit.

These are special capabilities that you are developing, but not a special unit.

OFCR. VANESSA KEORTGE: Correct, the department is just adding capabilities.

Detection on the Move

So that we can be clear, there are two different techniques here – the person-borne capability, and the off-lead capability. Can we explain those two?

OFCR. TOM: Sure. First is person-borne.

That's when you are following people for bomb detection, and you have to be able to feel the tension of the leash and have that connection with the animal.

OFCR. TOM: Right.

Person-borne means that a dog on a leash with a police handler is now capable of tracking a moving object – basically a person moving through a crowd, not just a fixed object. That's a new capability.

OFCR. ED: Yes. I think the biggest aspect of this whole program is the crowd aspect. We always were able to go to major events, but now we can actually walk the dogs through crowds. The dogs are searching not only fixed objects, but if anyone is carrying explosives, the dogs will alert on that and follow the person or persons. We are actually checking crowds where before we never were able to do that. It was just strictly fixed objects or a space, but before the crowds got there. Now we don't have to worry. We can check before, during and after the event. The "during" part is the best. It's a new capability.

SGT. MITCH: Look at the Boston Marathon bombing. The areas prior to the marathon were secured. They were swept, and there were no explosives there. They believe that the Tsarnaev brothers, the suspects, left their backpacks with the explosives and took off. A person-borne canine in that area – like we have now – might have worked the crowd and alerted to the presence of explosive materials.

It seems like motion is a big part of this. That's not something that you really had in your skill set before.

OFCR. TOM: Correct.

That seems like a big deal.

OFCR. TOM: It's a huge deal, and like Sgt. Lambdin said, with the Boston Marathon bombing there is a good indication based on what we all know from canine training that even if there were explosive-detection dogs deployed at that event, which there were, the potential is that those two suspects could have had those backpack bombs on and walked right past those K9s, and those K9s probably would not have alerted because they are not trained to detect odor in transit, and they are also not trained to detect odor on people. So even if the dogs were to get their noses in good proximity to those devices, the likelihood is they probably would not have alerted because that training was not available.

OFCR. ED: They would have probably sensed there is odor there, but they are not trained to follow it.

OFCR. TOM: They wouldn't have known what to do.

OFCR. ED: It's a very hard thing to train a dog for motion sensing. I think the trainers go through 100 dogs, and only one or two make it.

OFCR. TOM: That doesn't necessarily mean the dog won't be a good detection dog. They are phenomenal detection dogs and they go on to do traditional (fixed) detection work. But as far as the person-borne piece – the ability to search people in motion on a leash – it's about a 90 percent failure rate of candidate dogs.

And it appears that they are all Labradors.

OFCR. TOM: For the most part, yes. No one wants a German shepherd coming up and smelling their clothes and their crotch and their backpack when they are walking through a bus terminal. They come very close, about six eight inches away from a person.

SGT. MITCH: People have a comfort level with those dogs. Most people don't even realize they've been searched.

OFCR. TOM: Which is ideal.

OFCR. ED: Another aspect is the officers – we have to be looking at people as they come to us. If you are the suicide bomber, we will probably see it before the dog does because you're going to show those things that you just can't hide. The dog is a huge



K9s in Action

➤ **Off-Leash (Off-Lead):** The LAPD has also implemented a technique where Bomb Detection Officers can employ detection K9s off leash in certain limited situations.

Motion Detection in Practice

The LAPD's new person-borne technique uses bomb detection K9s on-leash to track explosive odors in motion. This sequence shows how it works:



In this training exercise, Officer Tom DeLuccia and Nellie are actively monitoring a public space. Nellie tracks the odors of passers-by, as she has done repeatedly during the exercise.



Nellie picks up a possible scent and focuses on a possible source of that scent.

Speedy Sweeps

By taking their dogs off-leash, the LAPD Bomb Detection Section can speed up inspections, and make them safer.

One of the advantages of the bomb detection dogs being off-leash is that they can perform a sweep much more quickly than if they are tethered to their handler. In this demonstration, Officer Tom DeLuccia uses hand signals to direct Nellie to sweep a row of vehicles.



Officer Tom DeLuccia observes as Nellie sweeps an industrial yard off-leash (training exercise).

The Laser Technique

Officer Vanessa Keortge can employ Riddick off-leash by using a laser pointer. This increases the speed of the search and keeps Officer Keortge at a safe distance.

In this demonstration, Officer Keortge points a bright green laser (able to be seen in daylight) at the target she wants Riddick to sweep – in this case, a car at the end of the LAPD parking lot.



Riddick takes off for the target, illuminated by the green laser light. (In this shot, Riddick is actually returning to Officer Keortge.)



Riddick is rewarded for a successful sweep by Officer Tom DeLuccia.



Nellie has located the scent – in the backpack of this undercover LAPD officer.



Officer Ed Dominguez releases Duchess off-leash to sweep an office (training exercise).



Riddick alerts at a box containing explosive dust (inert).

A Reunion With Riddick the Hero

LAPD detection dog Riddick reunites with the former Marine Corps handler whose life he saved.

Photos courtesy Anthony Cooper

When the Afghanistan conflict was drawing down in 2012, the Marine Corps started returning some of its bomb-detection dogs back to K2, the company that trains them in North Carolina.

Riddick, who's now in the hands of the LAPD, came back a hero, having saved the life of his handler, U.S. Marine Sgt. Anthony Cooper, at least twice.

"Riddick and I were working in the personal security detachment for the Battalion Commander and Sgt. Major," Anthony recalls. "We also did regular missions. I had to acclimatize Riddick to 120-degree temperatures.

"In 2012, we ended up finding three IEDs – improvised explosive devices," Anthony continues. "In the first, we got attacked by four suicide bombers. Four days later, in clearing an area, we found a bombed-out white vehicle that had delivered the suicide bombers. That vehicle had already been cleared supposedly, but I sent Riddick over there anyway because I had a weird gut feeling about it. Riddick covered (alerted) on the trunk of that vehicle. We were trained to trust our dog, and I trusted Riddick. Turns out there were 150 pounds of explosives in that vehicle. It had a timer that would have gone off 30 minutes after we found it, and a secondary switch in the ignition." Most of those, if not all, in the area would have been killed if it weren't for Anthony's instincts and Riddick's skills.

"A couple of weeks later, I was driving with my dog to a location, and my vehicle struck a 60-pound IED, which exploded. The vehicle was damaged, but everyone was fine. Five minutes later, another in the vehicle said he needed me to search for secondaries (additional devices). We searched. Not even 25 feet away from us, he found a secondary 60-pounder. If it hadn't been for Riddick, myself and four others wouldn't be here today.

"The third time, at another location, there was a smaller five-pound directional charge with ball bearings aimed toward the normal route that the Afghan National Army drove. Riddick and I found that, and it was disarmed before it could harm anyone."

"We were told we had a chance to adopt the dogs after the drawdown. I mean, that dog saved my life at least twice. I couldn't bear losing him. But by the time I got the paperwork done, it



Marine Sgt. Anthony Cooper and Riddick in Afghanistan.

wasn't quick enough – Vanessa and the LAPD had already picked up my dog."

But that's not the end of the story.

"Riddick and I had already started training together," LAPD Officer Vanessa Keortge recalled. "In September 2013, I got a phone call from our administration building saying, 'Someone's looking for him.' So I called the number, and it was Anthony. And he said, 'Well, that dog saved my life in Afghanistan.'"

Officer Vanessa organized a reunion at the LAPD Academy between Riddick and Anthony, who, after his honorable discharge, now lives in Southern California.

"My heart dropped the first time I saw him again," Anthony remembers. "For the first five minutes or so, it was like he didn't quite recognize me. But as soon as I started playing around with him and giving him orders, it was like you couldn't take him away from me."

"Then they started roughhousing and playing like they were old friends," Officer Vanessa said.

Was she worried about losing Riddick?

"My overall worry was that Anthony was going to want Riddick back," she continued. "But no – Anthony is happy that Riddick is working and still serving the community, and not just idling away in a kennel somewhere."

The friendship continues, as Officer Vanessa has invited Anthony over to her family home for a couple more reunions, and even some informal training sessions.

"I wouldn't trade him for any other dog," Anthony says. "He saved my life. To the Marine Corps, he was just another piece of gear. But to us, it was more of a friendship, just like any other Marine – you watch my back, I'll watch yours. I would rather him remain in service, keeping people safe." ■



Marine Sgt. Anthony Cooper (kneeling) and Riddick in Afghanistan. With them is Navy Hospitalman Jay Kemp.

K9s in Action, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

Video Monitor

Another innovation is the use of a video monitor, so that Officer Keortge can monitor what Riddick is seeing. The system has a functional distance of about 30 or 40 feet at this point, but the bomb detection unit is hoping to increase it to about 100 yards.



Riddick is kitted out with a video camera and transmitter.



LEFT: The video camera lens atop Riddick.

RIGHT: The video monitor.



Officer Keortge explains the video monitor system to Club CEO John Hawkins.

The *Alive!* Interview, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

aspect of it, but we are a big component of that, too. We have to recognize the different behaviors of people, how they are reacting to the dog, and why they are trying to avoid us in a certain way.

Could this person-borne capability possibly have prevented Boston? Was this developed because of Boston or at least accelerated because of Boston?

OFCR. TOM: Yes, for a couple of reasons. We can now be out there and potentially detect these devices as they are moving with a person. But also for the deterrent factor – if our officers are out deployed with our marked SUVs in uniform with the canines like Sgt. Lambdin mentioned, we are hardening the target. The hope is that we've hardened that target to the point where terrorists are going to want to cancel that operation and move on.

OFCR. ED: The City of Los Angeles has done a great thing with the LAPD getting these dogs and their capabilities; let's be in the forefront of this.

So ideally in a perfect world, how many person-borne dogs should there be in LA?

OFCR. ED: As many as we can get.

Unleashing the K9s

Okay, now let's talk about the other part of this – off-leash. I think you call it off-lead.

SGT. MITCH: Sure. By going off-lead, we can sweep much larger areas. These three dogs can go off-lead and search an entire area in a much quicker way. They can search human beings, too, as they are going through. The TSA canines don't typically do that.

OFCR. VANESSA: The off-lead capabilities, typically, are mission-oriented. That means there is something specific that we're looking to clear that we don't want a handler to go up on. Also sometimes we have used it in houses where there is a lot of clutter and it's hard for the dog on a leash and a handler to get through it. The dog can do it much more easily alone.

It's also used sometimes when it's just quicker to clear an area that needs to be cleared. But it's done in a controlled environment, meaning the public is not walking through and vehicular traffic is not flowing through; that's for the safety of the dog and the handler and the public. Most of our basic clearing is done on-leash because we are clearing something very specific. But if it's mission-oriented, where a car or a garage has to be swept before officers go in and search it, that's when we use the off-lead capabilities.

SGT. MITCH: Another aspect of off-lead capabilities is what we would refer to as a force multiplier. When Patrol gets a bomb threat at a large building, maybe a ten-story office building, and they want that cleared, it takes hours of manpower – not just the people doing the searching but the people who have to secure the perimeter around that. It really affects Patrol operations. It can affect traffic patterns, all kinds of things. It's a mess. Where you get three or five off-lead dogs that can go in there, one per floor, you can clear a ten-story building in a very short period of time, depending on what's inside the building.

OFCR. TOM: We've done that. Not too long ago, Ed and I went to a school for a call that was brought on by Major Crimes. They asked us to come out for a non-specific bomb threat. We went out to the school and we cleared that school before the first student even got there. We showed up at six in the morning, and we cleared the school in about an hour or less.

OFCR. ED: And another great aspect of it is Duchess, Nellie and Riddick can all work together at the same time.

OFCR. TOM: In the same proximity.

OFCR. ED: Working and ignoring each other. They are working in their own specific areas and off-lead, which is tough to do. It's tough to get the dogs to focus on the task at hand and not focus on each other.

SGT. MITCH: In the K9 world, that's significant. When we take most of our standard dogs and do a sweep somewhere, we'll get there at four o'clock in the morning, and it sounds like madness.

OFCR. TOM: That's because they are pack animals; the alpha is antagonizing the others. They all want to socialize.

We can cut the leashes on the dogs and they can all run and sweep, and through hand and arm signals we can keep them in their lanes. They will all do what they are supposed to do. It's amazing.

We had a radio call a couple of years back at an office building in downtown LA. It would have taken Patrol probably four or five hours to hand-search that building and go through every floor, every cabinet,

everything. We ran the dogs, at the time, on-lead and were able to clear the office building in about an hour, or an hour and a half. So that freed up those resources. Without us, radio calls are coming in, crimes are being committed. Police officers can't be out there doing what they have to do because they are sitting there physically searching a location that's taking them a long time.

And it's also dangerous. What if they encounter a device let's say in a laptop, and the officer opens it and it goes off? As canine handlers, we don't physically touch anything when we search. The dog does everything with its nose, and the dog doesn't nudge or push anything, either. Our dogs all give what's called a passive response. That means they sit, they stare and they focus on the object or where they believe the odor is coming from. They don't scratch it. They don't paw at it. They don't nudge it.

SGT. MITCH: Traditionally the handler would have to take them from object to object. When an off-lead dog is released in the room, it just scans around. It might do that for half a second in one spot, and we already know whether there is something there or not.

OFCR. TOM: I might not even have to come in the room. I could direct that dog from the threshold, cast the dog in, let the dog do what it has to do, and then it will alert.

That's impressive.

OFCR. TOM: Yes.

Cutting-Edge

This is a fairly new technology in the country, correct? It's on the cutting edge of using K9s in anti-terrorism situations, is that true?

OFCR. ED: Absolutely.

SGT. MITCH: It truly is, and we are hoping to expand it so that Incident Commanders from the Police Department throughout the City, when they have their different events, can call us. We can just add that little extra layer of security that is currently not there.

OFCR. ED: I don't think a lot of agencies right now in the entire country are running this. It's brand new. It's just coming out to the forefront now.

OFCR. TOM: As far as we know, the Maryland State Police and Johns Hopkins University have adopted it. But we are the only municipal police department in the United States that has this.

Have any other departments come here looking for your advice?

SGT. MITCH: We get that all the time, actually.

OFCR. ED: We have been working closely with the other K9 units in the area. We were out at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. The LA County Sheriff's Dept. has a lot of area to cover, and, knowing that, we can assist and vice-versa with them. And Amtrak, too. We are creating those relationships now where before we weren't able to because we were restricted.

OFCR. TOM: The Metro lines. I talked to the terrorism liaison officer yesterday from Central Division, and I asked him if he had any areas he wanted us to work on. He said, "I'd really like you guys to sweep my train stations," even though the Sheriff covers that through the MTA contract. A sergeant from Central now can deploy us or ask us for our help, and we can come down there and help out with that.

A Changing World

Who developed these techniques?

SGT. MITCH: Auburn University researches what's called vapor wake. Think of it like blowing out a candle with a little trail of smoke. That's what the off-lead dog has to be trained to alert to.

For the actual training, we work with K2 Kennels in North Carolina, a big supplier to the U.S. Military. They have a lot of credibility.

Whose idea was it to bring this capability to the LAPD?

SGT. MITCH: Really it's a team effort from the Bomb Detection Canine section. They are all experienced handlers.

OFCR. VANESSA: And Chief Downing.

OFCR. TOM: Chief Michael Downing procured the grants to purchase these dogs.

SGT. MITCH: And he allocated the resources. The LAPD reallocated some police officer positions that didn't exist in our unit. Staffing of our TSA unit did not go down to staff these additional positions.

Chief Downing is very forward-looking. He's the Counter Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau Chief. His whole thing is – the world has changed. It used to be we'd either find the device or have an explosion, and then we'd start dealing with it. We've got to be way ahead of that. We are out there as a deterrent, hoping to find something that's been introduced before it gets to a dangerous situation. Let's intercept it before it ever happens. That's the way to go.

There is so much intelligence out there now. There are so many social media threats, and there are so many copycats, lone-wolf-type individuals out there now. It would be negligent if we were not out there trying to deal with these things. If we were just waiting until, oh, there's something unusual here, they've already defeated us at that point.

Spreading the Word

Since person-borne detection and off-lead detection are new, are you letting people in the department know?

OFCR. TOM: Part of our mission now is to go out to the roll calls and the City, the three of us, and introduce ourselves to the different divisions and the watch commanders and let them know – number one, who we are; and two, what our capabilities are and what services we can provide to them. A lot of the officers don't know that Bomb K9 even exists unless they have used us or seen us at a search before. Everybody knows that Metro canines are out there because they have all utilized them before, but Bomb K9, because it's such a specialty, a lot of uniformed police officers have never utilized our services before and don't understand that we are a tool and a resource for them. Part of our mission is letting the different entities know we are a resource so they can start requesting our services.

SGT. MITCH: And we have to explain to them that there are different reasons that a dog might alert, and there are the different levels of force that would be appropriate based on what's going on. A lot of people don't understand exactly what happens when a dog alerts, so we've got to make it very clear to them before we deploy with them.

OFCR. ED: As far as the officers are concerned, if they see bomb detection, I think they think we're from the airport. They haven't realized, oh wait, we can free up. We are the City, not TSA. They can actually use us. They can call us for certain types of events.

Measures of Success

Are there any very early signs of success?

OFCR. TOM: I think the biggest measure of success for us is measured by what hasn't happened. If we are out there every day and we are deployed and going to different locations, and nothing happens, then to me that's the measure of success.

OFCR. ED: We've already been deployed to different areas throughout the City, including Pershing Square, L.A. Live and things like that. As long as we are out there and this capability is there, it's just another way of trying to prevent something, trying to be proactive.

OFCR. ED: The reception has been fantastic.

OFCR. TOM: Yes it's been huge. That's the best part.

OFCR. ED: People tell us, "Oh, wow, glad you guys are out here." They even recognize when they look at the dogs' vests that say, "Do Not Pet," they want to pet it but they know they can't. "Oh, the dog is working," they say. It's just been a great response.

OFCR. TOM: We've gotten emails and phone calls. We haven't had one location that we've gone to where we've had a bad reception. We get emails and phone calls from people, asking when we're coming back. It's really a positive thing. They really like seeing us out there.

Thank you all for your time.

THE OFFICERS: You're welcome. ■



Officer Ed Dominguez.