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Therapy dog in training: Ventura Fire's new comfort canine gears up to support local firefighters

Ventura, Calif. – The Ventura Fire Department's new comfort therapy dog, Hope, will provide emotional support to firefighters, staff, and those who have lived through a traumatic experience.

Hope, a Labrador Retriever and Cavadoodle mix, began her puppy manners class in May 2022 and has completed her American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen training and certification. She is on track to complete therapy training by December 2023, at which point she will be fully certified to provide comfort to those in need.

"First responders face higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, depression, and anxiety issues related to the volume and severity of tragic incidents they respond to each day," said Fire Chief David Endaya. "I am thrilled to welcome Hope to our team to help alleviate some psychological trauma impacting our firefighters."

As a therapy comfort dog, Hope's functions include easing tension, lowering post incident stress, anxiety levels, and blood pressure, reducing feelings of loneliness, providing support to those impacted by traumatic events, and visiting other City departments and various community events for educational purposes.

"We want to be our best selves, mentally and physically," said Heather Ellis, Ventura Fire's Emergency Medical Services Coordinator and Hope's handler. "Not having much time to decompress between incidents takes a toll. Hope just has a way of breaking the ice and immediately bringing a smile to everyone's face."

Hope was gifted to the department by VIP Dog Teams, a local non-profit dedicated to improving people's health through promoting the human-animal bond that leads to healing. When Hope is not on the job, she will be on-call 24/7, but will go home with her handler and serve as a family dog.

Continued veterinary care, food, and equipment for Hope will be covered by the Ventura Fire Foundation, a local non-profit. Learn more about the Ventura Fire Foundation and make a donation at www.VenturaFireFoundation.org.

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