
HEALTHCARE'S NEW BEST FRIEND: CONFLUENCE HEALTH ANNOUNCES NEW SECURITY DOG PROGRAM

Wenatchee, WA: Patients and visitors to Confluence Health Hospital's Central and Mares campuses soon might see the newest member of the Confluence Health staff on duty, and this staff member wears a fur coat rather than scrubs.

A part of the newly launched security dog program at Confluence Health, Atlas – a male 3-year-old German Shepard originally from Slovakia in Eastern Europe – and his handler, Justin Bennett, recently returned to the Wenatchee area after completing their extensive training. The four-legged addition to the security team is one of two dogs planned, with the second dog and handler arriving later in the year.

“Like programs at healthcare facilities around the country, our new security dog program features animals that are rigorously trained along with their specially selected handlers to help make Confluence Health patients and visitors, as well as staff and providers, feel safe,” commented John Urdahl, security and emergency preparedness director at Confluence Health. “While trained for a wide range of situations, the dogs’ primary roles will be to deter violent behavior by assisting their human counterparts in their rounds in the various facilities.”

Though they are working dogs, rather than pets, and their primary role is in assisting security, these new canine officers also love to interact with and visit staff and visitors while performing their duties, though dog-lovers should always be sure to ask the handler first before interacting with the security dog so as to not interfere with their work.

“Atlas is a real sweetheart to me and everyone he meets,” commented Bennett, Confluence Health’s first security team K9 handler. “Like most working dogs, he lives with me when not on duty and he has shown himself to have a really goofy and fun personality when not on the clock. In particular, he loves to run and explore new smells, like most dogs.”

Bennett himself is also new to the Confluence Health team, having been born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri. Growing up with dogs as a kid, he moved to Chicago after going to two of the top dog trainer schools in the country and later served as a training director for another dog training facility. Following this, Bennett then worked as an explosive detection K9 handler for the United States Department of Energy at both the Y-12 National Security Complex in Tennessee near the Oak Ridge National Laboratory and then at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, protecting the nation’s nuclear stockpile. In addition to his canine co-worker, Bennett also has another dog at home named Maple.

Along with the money provided by Confluence Health for the handlers’ positions, the Confluence Health Foundation contributed significant funding to help secure the dogs, their training, and the necessary vehicles for this new program.

“The Confluence Health Foundation works each day to enhance and support Confluence Health’s ability to provide safe and superior healthcare close to home,” explained Suzanne Carté-Cocroft, vice president of philanthropy at Confluence Health. “Because of its important focus on staff and patient safety, we knew this was an important program to be a part of and it had enthusiastic support from our board.”

In thanks for their contribution, the security team offered to allow the Confluence Health Foundation to select the name for the new four-legged member. The Foundation Board, in turn, reached out to Confluence Health staff and providers to help narrow down the list of names from those provided by the security officers, conducting an organization-wide vote held at the beginning of this year.

“We were so excited to see the engagement and enthusiasm from the staff,” continued Carté-Cocroft. “Staff and providers could vote for up to five of the 10 possible names. After 2202 votes cast by 930 people, the name ‘Atlas’ was the clear winner. Ultimately, the board wholeheartedly agreed with the staff choice and we’re all looking forward to meeting Atlas when he arrives.”

“We are excited to start up this new canine security program at Confluence Health,” remarked Dr. Andrew Jones, CEO of Confluence Health. “I have seen similar programs around the country and have witnessed the amazing benefits this brings, not only to the safety of patients and staff, but also in the joy it brings when the security dog visits on their rounds. These canine officers build community, as well as protecting it, and we’re looking forward to Atlas joining our team to help us in continuing to better serve and care for all the residents of North Central Washington.”

About Confluence Health

Confluence Health serves the largest geographic region of any healthcare system in Washington State, covering over 12,000 square miles of Okanogan, Grant, Douglas, and Chelan counties. Confluence Health is one of only two locally-lead healthcare systems in the state with the purpose of maintaining availability and access to high-quality, cost-effective healthcare services for North Central Washington. The Confluence Health Board of Directors provides governance for Confluence Health and includes nine community board members and six physician board members.

For More Information

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