



Trooper
Seth Payne
 Kentucky State Police,
 Post 4 – Elizabethtown

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Kentucky State Police Trooper Seth Payne's desire to work in the K-9 division kicked in from the start. In his 12 years with KSP, Payne has served both the Madisonville and Elizabethtown posts. Payne, along with his 3-year-old companion, Fero, and previous K-9, Barry, has successfully searched out illegal drugs and fleeing suspects for six years. Payne's passion for the job and his compassion for his K-9 partners also have led him, and other K-9 troopers, to begin the process of constructing a memorial for their fallen four-legged co-workers.

He has been married to his wife Emilee for nine years and they have two children, Lillie, 8 and Trigg, 3.

I was influenced by other troopers I knew and got to know in my late teens and early 20s. They encouraged me to follow this path.

It was a yearlong process from when I applied to entering the academy. It was a 22-week academy. It wasn't a whole lot of fun by any means, but it was good. There are things that went on that weren't fun at the time, but you look back now and it's a good laugh. It was a very serious, very structured, very professional environment.

I aggravated the previous K-9 handler and let him know that when he was ready to move on, I wanted his spot. And I was lucky enough to get it. I've been in the K-9 unit for six years. As a road trooper, I enjoyed finding drugs while working the road and I thought I'd have more opportunity to do that as a K-9 officer.

I took over the other handler's dog, Barry. I retired him and he lasted about a year in retirement. He died in December 2012. That's a big part of why I'm trying to start a K-9 memorial. When Barry died, I knew I was going to be moving from the house I lived in and didn't want to bury him there. So I had him cremated. So hopefully when we get the K-9 memorial built, we'll have a final resting place for him.

The K-9 memorial is not solely my idea. It's something that me and another trooper, David Archer, talked about and got more guys involved. We are trying to become a non-profit organization so we can take donations.

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After Barry retired, I asked the greater Hardin County Narcotics Task Force director, Ron Eckhart, if he'd be willing to buy me a dog and donate it to the state police. And he did. My K-9, Fero, is a German Shepherd, imported from Slovakia. I went to a K-9 academy in Evansville for six weeks and trained there with Fero.

In addition to searches, I also receive calls for tracking. One of my favorite things to do is tracking someone who runs from an officer.

Fero is a dual purpose drug and patrol dog. He can find cocaine, meth, marijuana, heroin and Ecstasy. He can also do article searches. If you give me your keys and it has your human scent on it, I can throw them out in field, and he can find them. Anything with human odor in an area, like a field, where there shouldn't be human odor, he can go out and find it.

We once found a gun that a suicidal suspect had laid near the railroad tracks. It was in a huge area. We went out there and he was off lead and he found the gun hidden under leaves on the side of the railroad tracks. We never would have found it without the dog. That's the most rewarding part about K-9. Sometimes, you'll be searching and the dog finds things officers would have found. But, sometimes, there is no way it would have been found if the dog wasn't there.

In June 2012, Fero and I tracked a guy who had kidnapped a girl and sexually assaulted her. She fought back and he ran off in the woods. We were able to track him down and apprehended him. That was the highlight of my career — especially my K-9 career.

I'm on call 24/7. The worst part is when you're in a dead sleep and the phone rings. And you don't know what it is on the other end of the line. Sometimes it's something simple and easy that you can take care of and other times it's a track an hour away you have to get to in the middle of nowhere.

Balancing work life and personal life is difficult, especially being on call all the time. I know I'm on call and I take that seriously — I want to be available. That's my job and I signed up for it. But it's hard with my dog because he's not very social. If I go out of town, I can only take one-night trips. I don't leave the dog alone for extended periods of time; I have to be the one to take care of him.

Last year my family and I went to Gatlinburg — it was the first time we'd been on vacation. We actually took Fero and kenneled him down there. Then I would go every day and feed him and exercise him. Of course, I was supposed to be on vacation, but that was the trade off to stay more than one night.

There are 15 other troopers and five commercial vehicle enforcement guys in the K-9 division. We are divided in east and west — I'm in the west. As far as the west guys go, we are a tight-knit group. If something happens to a family member, we're all there. If someone needs help doing something, I know there are guys in K-9 that I can call and they'll be there. And I do the same for them.

We re-certify once a year. We train once a week for what we call maintenance training. Just like with law enforcement, things are constantly changing. With K-9s you have to be constantly training for different things and learning new things on how to train.

K-9s are a great tool, but they're not perfect, just like people. There are days I'm not happy with his performance, but that is rare because he is a high-drive dog, he's always wanting work. Sometimes it may not be his fault. It may be my fault. It may be drugs packaged where he just can't smell it. But for the most part he is very good at what he does. 🐾

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