

Ohio

Community Facilities | Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant

Public Safety Gets Boost in Popular Ohio Vacation Destination



Patrolman Jason Keeler sits in the new K-9 outfitted SUV; one of two new SUVs delivered recently to the Geneva-on-the-Lake (OH) Police Department. USDA Photo.

Rural communities and small towns could teach master classes in creative problem solving for operating on tight budgets and stretching scarce resources.

Until recently, Geneva-on-the-Lake, a picturesque vacation spot on Lake Erie in Ohio's northeastern Ashtabula County, was literally holding its police vehicle fleet together with "duct tape and bailing wire."

"We had six police vehicles and five went down because ground water was getting into the gas supply," said Geneva-on-the-Lake Police Chief Kyle Cawley. "Our first vehicle went down in 2022, and

when we would fix one, another would break because of different problems."

This issue might not have a significant impact on larger city police departments, but it does cause concern for public safety in a small, popular vacation destination like Geneva-on-the-Lake that welcomes nearly 2.5 million visitors every year.

"We have four full-time officers and 20 part-time officers, who are employed mostly during the tourist season which runs from Memorial Day to Labor Day when we run two 12-hour shifts per day," said Chief Cawley. "They work two to three shifts in the summer months, and two to three times per week in the off season."

So, when the village needed to update its police fleet, it knew just where to turn. They had partnered with USDA Rural Development (RD) on other projects in the past – from purchasing vehicles to constructing new facilities – so the existing relationship helped make the process easier.

This time, village administrators worked with the Ohio RD team on a low interest loan and grant combination through the [Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant](#) program to make purchasing two new police vehicles more affordable.

“We started the process in 2022 with a goal of having vehicles on hand by 2023,” said Chief Cawley. “We had set money aside to purchase the vehicles, but without USDA funding, it would not have been enough, and we still would have been down a car.”

In September 2024, the village received two new sport utility vehicles (SUVs) for the police department - an unmarked patrol unit for everyday use and an upgraded K-9 unit.

K-9 Team Gets Upgrade

With some planning and help from donors, Geneva-on-the-Lake set up its K-9 unit in 2021 and welcomed Luka, a Dutch Malinois puppy, as the newest member of its police team. To keep Luka fit and ready for duty, donations were also set up to pay for his training, equipment, routine medical care, and food.

With everything in place Luka, who is trained in narcotics and article detection, went on patrol in his K-9 cruiser with his partner to keep the community safe.

“The dog is also an important asset for crowd control, and he cuts down on pursuits and wrestling with perpetrators,” said Patrolman Jason Keeler, Luka’s handler and partner. “It’s like having a second officer at my side.”



Patrolman Jason Keeler and K-9 Officer Luka of the Geneva-on-the-Lake (OH) Police Department take a break from training. USDA Photo.



Officer Luka demonstrates how the “door pop” device works on Geneva-on-the-Lake’s new K-9 vehicle. USDA Photo.

The cruiser Luka shared with Patrolman Keeler, however, was small, outdated, and experienced mechanical issues like other vehicles in the fleet.

But that changed recently with delivery of the village’s new K-9 equipped SUV which has updated technology, added safety features, and a larger, better climate-controlled space so the partners can ride in comfort while keeping the streets safe.

“The new vehicle has heat and climate control features making it much easier to ensure Luka is comfortable,” said Patrolman Keeler. “I also love the ‘door pop’ which can be activated to release the dog from the vehicle as an added safety feature for the officer if it is needed.”

During off duty hours, Luka lives with Patrolman Keeler so the two can keep up with their training and continue bonding with each other.

Community Facilities Loan and Grant – Geneva-on-the-Lake Police

“The nature of this breed of dog means that we have to train him constantly because of his energy level,” said Patrolmen Keeler. “The training time serves as stimulation for Luka, and he gets excited about it.”

Obligation: \$95,000 Community Facilities Loan / \$50,000 Community Facilities Grant

Obligation Date: July 19, 2023

Congressional: U.S. Rep. David Joyce (OH-14); U.S. Senators Bernie Moreno and Jon Husted