

# North Fulton Rotary honors first responders

## Rotary gifts K-9 with ballistic vest

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ALPHARETTA, Ga. — The Rotary Club of North Fulton recently held a special luncheon as a thank you to local firefighters and police.

Dozens of first responders were treated Jan. 12 to a meal organized by the Rotary and catered by Smokejack BBQ.

The appreciation luncheon was planned for months by the club as part of its mission to support the community in a meaningful way.

"Anything we can do to give back to these men and women who put their lives on the line for us every day is a wonderful thing," said Natalie Hudgins, president of the Rotary Club of North Fulton. "There's no way we can ever fully repay them for the service they provide us. Every little bit of appreciation that we can show, every positive action that we can take for them, is the least we can do for them."

During the luncheon, a local K-9 police dog was presented with a new, specially-fitted ballistic vest and several dog toys. The vest alone cost \$2,800 and was funded fully by the Rotary as a gift to the Alpharetta Department of Public Safety.

The K-9, Mattis, has recently recovered from a lacerated liver and heavy internal bleeding sustained while apprehending two suspects.

"I'm a huge animal lover, and I'm also a big supporter of our first responders and military, so I tried to put those two together," Hudgins said. "I have first responders in my family, and I've seen how important the K-9s are, not just for the job, but for the first responders personally."

The bulletproof vest is specially sized and fit specifically for Mattis to provide coverage for his chest, back, sides and abdomen while he's on duty.

It's light, at only about 2.5 pounds, and easy to put on Mattis in the case of a life-threatening situation.

"There are no words that can adequately thank you enough for what you do for our community, for how much you sacrifice and give up for us," Hudgins told the first responders. "Thank you."



JULIA GROCHOWSKI/HERALD

Police officer Mark Tappan, left, sits with K-9 Mattis and president of the Rotary Club of North Fulton, Natalie Hudgins.

## K-9 Mattis survives a 30-foot drop

Officer Mark Tappan has been working with K-9 Mattis for the Alpharetta Department of Public Safety for more than a year. Mattis is specially trained for protection and apprehension.

But the canine was severely injured back in October, when he fell down a 30-foot retaining wall while pursuing a suspect. Despite his injuries, including what was later discovered to be a lacerated liver and heavy internal bleeding, Mattis caught the suspect, got up again and went on to catch another. Mattis collapsed soon after his victory, however, and had to undergo emergency surgery that night.

"I was a wreck. Mattis goes home with me. He stays with my family. He's my best friend. He's with me more than any person on the planet," Tappan said. "I still remember to this day. I still have nightmares of him falling."

Mattis has since made a full recovery and was back in the game only a month after the surgery.

Through time, Mattis has not once lost his positive attitude, Tappan said. "He's so lovable," Tappan said. "He never gets out of control, even when I've had to use him. He's just so clear headed and a great dog."

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