

Loyal Blue



As two of the most ardent supporters of law enforcement in New Jersey – and even around the world – Dr. Caesar and Deanna DePaco have gone way above and beyond to bolster the blue line

■ BY MITCHELL KRUGEL
■ PHOTOS BY ED CARATTINI JR.

Beyond the 30-foot pole with the thin blue line flag, beyond the carved stone statue of a police officer on the front lawn, beyond the walls full of proclamations and tokens of appreciation gifted from agencies throughout the world, the most illustrious confirmation of Dr. Caesar and Deanna DePaco's boundless backing of the blue looms almost unnoticeably. Their basement/museum showcases artifacts received from the DePacos' many, many, many, many donations of crime-fighting gear, vehicles, equipment and K-9s – nearly 200 dogs and counting – to departments in almost all 50 states and other countries.

The walls of the basement are painted blue. It's more than the appropriate decor to go with the blue plates, blue shot glasses and Blue Lives Matter napkins sitting on the magnificent bar in the room.

If these walls could talk, they would express how far above and beyond Caesar and Deanna have gone with their support. How they are kicking defunding the police in the you-know-whats with self-



The Hazlet PD created this recognition of the support from Dr. Caesar and Deanna DePaco.

less and unprecedented generosity. How their relentless pay-it-forward mentality rubs off on everybody who benefits from and witnesses how they have become law enforcement's best friends.

"I've been saying this for years with respect and admiration that I don't want my daughters to live in a world without law enforcement," Caesar gushes with a humility that goes above and beyond as well. "Obviously, I'm very anti-defunding the

police. Unfortunately, some of these departments are being defunded. So that's where we step in as much as we can."

Having the DePacos pictured on the cover of this issue of *NJ Cops Magazine* is a distinction afforded to very few civilians. But it's a distinction here that is well earned and well deserved, which is more than evident just by being welcomed into their humble home.

The trio of 30-foot flagpoles that also sport a green line flag for the military and another one for POWs and MIAs tips to the support that flows from the DePacos. And though they were never planned to be this way, the two stone lions standing watch on the steps leading into the house are reminiscent of those guarding the entrance to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The NJ State PBA's friendship with the DePacos inspired them amid the pandemic in 2020, when they donated \$25,000 to the Survivor and Welfare Fund to sponsor the purchase of a new Special Services trailer that lends support at events throughout New Jersey. They also sponsored the purchase of the drone the

PBA uses to showcase images of its members doing their own philanthropy, as well as other endeavors of protecting and serving.

"There's strong commitment that's not just unwavering financial support, but just always making a positive statement," PBA President Pat Colligan praises of the DePacos. "Even at the height of the response to the George Floyd incident, when it could have been very costly for him, Caesar was not shy about his position on law enforcement. I mean, you pull up to his house and there is no question that he is pro-law enforcement. There's nothing undercover about what they do."

Blue bloods

Those basement walls are adorned with showcases full of badges Dr. DePaco has received. And a few Deanna has been presented.

He starts talking faster when giving a tour of his honors.

Pointing at one, he says, "This is me, Mercer County Prosecutor's Office honorary detective."

He scans for the first badge he received as an honorary officer. Dr. DePaco thought it was from Hillsborough PD, to which he donated the first K-9 in 2013. But Deanna reminded him that was not the case.

"The first one I got was Flagler County Sheriff's Office," he revealed about the agency on the northeast coast of Florida to which he donated a K-9.

He runs through some of the others: Honorary chief with Hillsborough Township. Honorary commissioner with the borough of Peapack & Gladstone. Somerset County Sheriffs. Point Pleasant Beach. Daytona Beach. At least 20, including one from Brigham City, Utah, where they presented the most recent K-9.

"I always wanted to be in law enforcement," Caesar commented.

But he couldn't.

Dr. DePaco was born in Portugal and came to the U.S. in 1994. His mother is a U.S. citizen and made sure Caesar got a green card when they came over. He earned a Ph.D. in psychology, and at 30 wanted to get into law enforcement. But you have to be a U.S. citizen to become a cop.

"And I'm extremely patriotic. I believe in one nationality," Dr. DePaco reasoned. "My citizenship is Portuguese, and I don't believe in dual citizenship. I never became a U.S. citizen, so this is my way of fulfilling my dream – helping law enforcement."

His business is Summit Nutritionals International®, which manufactures bulk chondroitin sulfate made from avian, bovine, marine and porcine and is a raw material used by pharmaceutical companies. Prior to the company's inception, raw

nutritional supplements were primarily manufactured in Europe and other parts of the world. Summit Nutritionals is 100 percent U.S. made.

Deanna has put her MBA to use working on Summit Nutritionals for the past 12 years, beginning four years after she and Caesar were married. The success of the business has enabled their backing of the blue, for which they note their greatest reward is to be able to call those they help brothers and sisters in blue.

Caesar used to serve as the Portuguese consul for the state of Florida, and one of his official visits in 2018 to the Bristol, Massachusetts, PD resulted in living the dream.

"I was talking with the sheriff because 40 percent of his deputies were of Portuguese descent," Dr. DePaco recalled. "He found out what I was doing for law enforcement. So he said, 'Dr. DePaco, would you like to be a deputy with Bristol County Sheriff's Office?' And I said, 'I would be honored, but I cannot because I'm not a U.S. citizen.' And he got up and said, 'Dr. DePaco, today you are a U.S. citizen.' And I was sworn in."

Blue angels

The millions of dollars the DePacos have donated and the thousands of people that has affected – some of whose lives have even been saved – began with the first K-9 gifted to the Hillsborough Township PD. Initially, they wanted to give their dog, Casanova, to Hillsborough, but Deanna and their daughters had grown too attached to him.

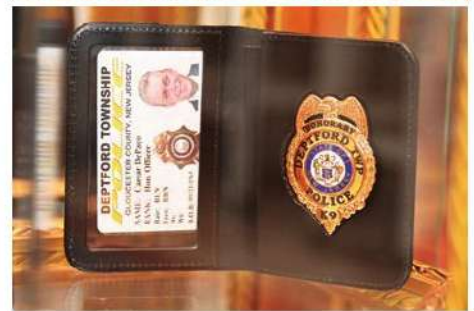
Then-Hillsborough Chief Paul Kaminski, now the undersheriff in Somerset County, acknowledged how he had been trying to get the town to authorize a K-9 program, but funding had become precarious. He figured it was a nonstarter, when the DePacos wanted to keep Casanova.

"I told him, 'I appreciate the offer,' and he's like, 'No, no, no, no, no. My word is gold,'" Kaminski shared. "That's how the relationship started. He went from there to assist us with vehicles, Tasers and weapons. Anything that we needed that we felt that was difficult to offset the budget and purchase, he came through. He's a true friend of law enforcement."

Hillsborough's first K-9 officer was Chris Englehardt, who went to Florida to pick up that first dog. Shortly thereafter, he became the DePacos' confidant in helping to orchestrate all future donations.

After donating that first dog, Deanna started noticing posts of K-9s being lost in the line of duty. That's when they stepped up their support nationally.

"It started as a tragic endeavor, and then it's just expanded and grown to other things," she explained. "You start to



Like the Deptford Township Police Department, many agencies have honored Caesar and Deanna as honorary officers. They have these badges displayed in a cabinet in their home.



In front of the DePacos' home are three huge flagpoles with flags honoring law enforcement officers, military veterans and POWs/MIAs.

become part of the group, feeling what they're feeling, their trials and tribulations. It becomes emotional, and it's something unsurmountable. You can't even put words to it. So that became our addiction, seeing what we could do to help out."

Englehardt adds that five or 10 minutes after seeing a post that an officer was hurt or a dog was lost, he gets a call from the DePacos to reach out to the agency and ask what they need. Sometimes, a chief

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32



Hillsborough Township Local 205 member Chris Englehardt was the first officer to partner with a dog that the DePacos donated. He now works with them to facilitate donations to agencies in New Jersey and throughout the world.

LOYAL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

would not believe him and would ask for the contact info of another agency that had received a donation, almost like a makeshift background check.

The agency would quickly find out that the benefactors had no interest in what's in it for them.

"They soon find out that it's strictly from the family's heart," Englehardt ac-

centuated. "It was mind-blowing that somebody would want to help law enforcement the way they do. It's hard to imagine that someone could give \$50,000 or \$75,000 or a brand-new, fully equipped Tahoe to agencies for K-9s. It's where their heart is."

True blue

The trail of donations leads from New Jersey to Florida to Texas to California and

even Alaska, where they have gifted two K-9s. They donate Harley-Davidsons to motors units and the trailers to transport the bikes.

But it's not a gravy train. If a department or other police organization emails Caesar or Deanna, they will forward it to Englehardt. If it's one from New Jersey, chances are, he probably knows somebody there. If it's outside the state, he makes a few calls.

The standard is to make sure the department really does require assistance and funding, and it's not an officer trying to take advantage of the DePacos' affinity for contributing.

"If we come to the conclusion that the department really requires our assistance, they don't have the funds and they really need equipment, then we definitely step in," Englehardt added.

Dr. DePaco confided that he wishes he could do way more. That wish seems to come true.

As he was guiding the tour of the pieces in the basement, he stopped to share an email he received from the Ocean County Police Academy. The academy previously had contacted the sheriff's office for help with purchasing new gym equipment.

Then, the DePacos toured the academy and met with staff. They saw the recruits training in the gym on defensive tactics.

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Lanzer is the DePacos' current security dog and is officially deputized by the Somerset County Sheriff's Department.

As of the first view of the email requesting support, they had not decided on the donation. A minute or so afterward, the assistance was in the works.

"This donation is going to affect every cop that goes through that police academy because they use that throughout their training," Englehardt noted about the impact of the donations.

But it's not just about grand gestures.

Somerset County Sheriff Darrin Russo, who deputized the DePacos' current German shepherd, Lanzer, submitted that they recently provided bicycles and accompanying attire and equipment for

the Franklin Township PD neighborhood police team. And a few years ago, Sheriff Russo was visiting the DePacos at their home when Russo told them he had to leave because he was going on an early bike ride the next day.

"He says, 'Oh, you ride a bike.' I told him it was for the Police Unity Tour. I told him about it and that my son and I were riding it. He said, 'I'll sponsor the both of you to ride,'" Sheriff Russo recounted. "You know, it's very rare that you find someone that's that giving and caring for police. He just doesn't stop giving."



Somerset County Sheriff Darrin Russo and Undersheriff Paul Kaminski show a collage made for one of their K-9s donated by the DePacos.

Blue lines

Manifestation of the DePacos' kindness flows from the heir of the dog. They had witnessed the power of K-9s when they went to Kansas City in 2013 to see Casanova become certified.

They brought him back to Jersey to be their executive protection dog but soon realized there might be a higher calling for him. That was when the DePacos connected with Kaminski and Englehardt. And also when their oldest daughter, Valentina, who was 3 years old at the time, fell in love with Casanova.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 33

What's Your Next Move?

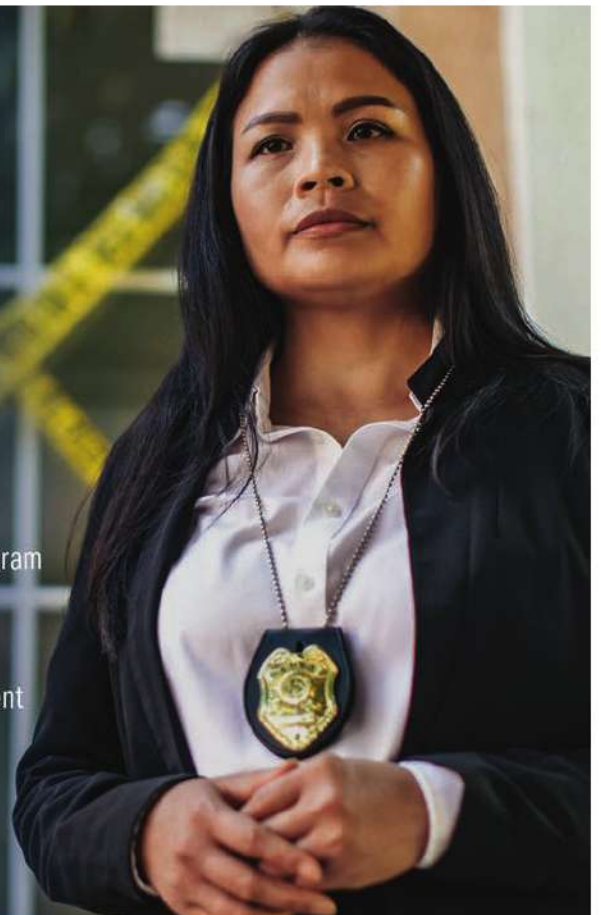
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A statue carved from stone that stands in front of their house shows the loyalty the DePacos have to law enforcement.

LOYAL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

The heir to Casanova was a gorgeous black Belgian Malinois named Kondro, a dual-purpose narcotics and patrol dog Englehardt had for seven years.

"He kept me in the game," Englehardt confirmed.

Therein lies the legacy. Kaminski relates



Many agencies that have received donations have given gifts to the DePacos, like this leash from the police department in Deland, Florida, or this specially made ballistic shield.



how the K-9s assist on a day-to-day basis, whether doing a bomb sweep, a narcotics sweep or search and rescue. He has seen how the dogs find individuals with Alzheimer's who have wandered away and gotten lost in the woods.

They do law enforcement work that can otherwise not be done. And they are a

valuable part of community policing.

"Letting the community see the dogs in action, it starts a dialogue and is a great resource into building community relationships," Kaminski added. "These K-9s continue to give eight, nine, 10 years within their career. It's a gift that keeps on giving and making differences in the com-



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