

Slain police dog is remembered in St. Clair Shores

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FULL TEXT

"If the evidence comes back and the young man had a gun, then that's another issue for them to deal with."

Oliver Gantt

Detroit activist

The St. Clair Shores community laid to rest Wednesday a beloved member of its police force, K-9 Axe, a police dog who died in the line of duty 10 days earlier.

A memorial service, complete with law enforcement canines and bagpipes, was held for Axe at the packed Assumption Greek Orthodox Church. The hour-long service occurred three days before the funeral for Theoddeus Gray, a Detroit man who police said shot Axe before officers fatally shot the 29-year-old.

The tragedy has brought together many in the lakeside community, who have adorned their homes and businesses with blue lights in support of Axe and police, and raised questions by others, including Gray's family, about what happened that night.

The shooting incident remains under investigation by the Macomb County Sheriff's Office. No dashcam or body camera video, or reports of the incident, have been released.

The memorial for Axe included a table with black cloth holding, among other items, a folded American flag, a badge and collar and a picture of the 4-year-old German shepherd. Law enforcement canines and their handlers filed past the table.

St. Clair Shores Mayor Kip Walby said the service was "to honor a fallen hero" that paid "the ultimate sacrifice." He said Axe pursued a suspect ahead of his human counterparts and may have saved the life of a colleague or bystander. He called what took place Nov. 4 "a chaotic situation."

Police Chief Todd Woodcox said he could not go into details because the sheriff's office is investigating, but said officers responded professionally and admirably, and the force lost a friend, a brother and "a valued member of our police department" who loved his job and family. Axe was with the force since 2016.

Terry Foley, president of the National Association of Professional Canine Handlers, told mourners Axe was named for a fallen Navy SEAL, that he eventually warmed up to his handler's wife and curled up next to family members, but also was "all business" on the job, being used more than 250 times to track suspects, search buildings, detect narcotics and find lost seniors and children.

As mourners remembered Axe and his family, the Gray family prepared for Gray's funeral Saturday in Detroit. His relatives declined to be interviewed, family spokesman and Detroit activist Oliver Gantt said.

Gray was attending a baby shower for his first child Nov. 4 at Lakeland Manor on Harper. Gantt said that Gray was shaking hands and greeting people, according to information he received from Gray's family. Gantt wasn't there, but he said something happened in the hall —an exchange of words —between Gray and his pregnant girlfriend's family.

City police said officers responded to the hall after receiving calls of a man with a rifle outside. About 70 people were inside, police said.

"Upon officer arrival, a male matching this description was observed standing outside the banquet hall," a news release stated. "The male ignored several demands from officers and attempted to flee the scene on foot."

Axe was deployed and was shot by the suspect with a handgun, the news release said. Officers returned fire, striking the suspect, who was taken to an area hospital where he was pronounced dead, police said.

Axe was taken to a Madison Heights animal hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Gantt said it's known both the dog and Gray were shot, but he said that it hasn't been reported that a gun was found near or around Gray, raising the question: "who do they think shot that dog?" He said Gray's family also said Gray did not have a gun when he was running and shot by police.

Gantt said "if the evidence comes back and the young man had a gun, then that's another issue for them to deal with."

The cause of Gray's death was multiple gunshot wounds and the manner of death was homicide, said Lisa Croff, spokeswoman for the Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office.

Gantt said the information he has received is that Gray was shot from behind at least 10 times from the head down. Authorities have not released details on the number or location of wounds, and the Free Press has requested a copy of the autopsy report through the Freedom of Information Act.

While Gray had runs-in with police, including a two-year prison sentence on a drug charge in 2013, Gantt said Gray also was his parent's only child who had a love for music, writing and producing his own music for a career in rap. Gantt said that Gray's family conveyed that Gray had a kind heart, loved his family and friends and was looking forward to being a father.

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Mourners attend the service for Axe at Assumption Greek Orthodox Church in St.Clair Shores.

Kirthmon F. Dozier/ Detroit Free Press

Theoddeus Gray

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